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A HOUSE IN BLOOMSBURY

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PRESS.

# A HOUSE IN BLOOMSBURY

*A NOVEL*

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

VOL. I.

London

HUTCHINSON & CO.

34 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1894





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## A HOUSE IN BLOOMSBURY.

### CHAPTER I.

"FATHER," said Dora, "I am going upstairs for a little, to see Mrs. Hesketh, if you have no objection."

"And who is Mrs. Hesketh, if I might make so bold as to ask?" Mr. Mannering said, lifting his eyes from his evening paper.

"Father! I told you all about her on Sunday—that she's all alone all day, and sometimes her husband is so late of getting home. She is so lonely, poor little thing. And she is such a nice little thing! Married, but not so big as me."

"And who is —— her husband?" Mr. Mannering was about to say, but he checked himself. No doubt he had heard all about the husband too.

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He heard many things without hearing them, being conscious rather of the pleasant voice of Dora running on than of everything she said,

This had, no doubt, been the case in respect to the young couple upstairs, of whose existence he had become dimly sensible by reason of meeting one or other of them on the stairs. But there was nothing in the appearance of either which had much attracted him. They appeared to him a commonplace couple of inferior kind; and perhaps had he been a man with all his wits keenly about him, he would not have allowed his child to run wild about the little woman upstairs. But Mr. Mannering did not keep his wits about him sharpened to any such point.

Dora was a child, but also she was a lady, proof against any contamination of acquaintance which concerned only the letters of the alphabet. Her "h's" could take care of themselves, and so could her "r's". As for anything else, Mr.

Mannering's dreamy yet not unobservant eyes had taken in the fact that the young woman, who was not a lady, was an innocent and good little woman ; and it had never occurred to him to be afraid of any chance influence of such a kind for his daughter. He acquiesced, accordingly, with a little nod of his head, and return of his mild eyes to his paper.

These two were the best of companions ; but he was not jealous of his little girl, nor did he desire that she should be for ever in his sight. He liked to read his paper ; sometimes he had a book which interested him very much. The thought that Dora had a little interest in her life also, special to herself, pleased him more than if she had been always hanging upon him for her amusement and occupation. He was not afraid of the acquaintance she might make, which was a little rash, perhaps, especially in a man who had known the world, and knew, or ought to have

known, the mischief that can arise from unsuitable associates.

But there are some people who never learn ; indeed, few people learn by experience, so far as I have ever seen. Dora had been an independent individuality to her father since she was six years old. He had felt, as parents often feel with a curious mixture of feelings, half pleasure, half surprise, half disappointment (as if there could be three halves ! the reader will say ; but there are, and many more), that she was not very much influenced by himself, who was most near to her. If such things could be weighed in any balance, he was most, it may be said, influenced by her. She retained her independence. How was it possible then that, conscious of this, he should be much alarmed by any problematical influence that could be brought to bear upon her by a stranger ? He was not, indeed, the least afraid.

Dora ran up the stairs, which were dark at the



top, for Mrs. Simcox could not afford to let her lodgers who paid so low a rent have a light on their landing; and the landing itself was encumbered by various articles, between which there was need of wary steering. But this little girl had lived in these Bloomsbury lodgings all her life, and knew her way about as well as the children of the house. Matters were facilitated, too, by the sudden opening of a door, from which the light and, sad to say, something of the smell of a paraffin lamp shone out, illuminating the rosy face of a young woman, with a piece of sewing in her hand, who looked out in bright expectation, but clouded over a little when she saw who it was. "Oh, Miss Dora!" she said; and added in an undertone, "I thought it was Alfred home a little sooner than usual," with a little sigh.

"I made such a noise," said Dora, apologetically. "I couldn't help it. Jane will leave so many things about."

"Oh, it's me, Miss Dora. I does my rooms myself; it saves a deal on the rent. I shouldn't have left that crockery there, but it saves trouble, and I'm not that used to housework."

"No," said Dora, seating herself composedly at the table, and resisting, by a strong exercise of self-control, her impulse to point out that the lamp could not have been properly cleaned, since it smelt so. "One can see," she added, the fact being incontestable, "that you don't know how to do many things. And that is a pity, because things then are not so nice."

She seemed to cast a glance of criticism about the room, to poor little Mrs. Hesketh's excited fancy, who was ready to cry with vexation. "My family always kep' a girl," she said in a tone of injury subdued. But she was proud of Dora's friendship, and would not say any more.

"So I should have thought," said Dora, critical, yet accepting the apology as if, to a

certain extent, it accounted for the state of affairs.

“And Alfred says,” cried the young wife, “that if we can only hold on for a year or two, he’ll make a lady of me, and I shall have servants of my own. But we ain’t come to that yet—oh, not by a long way.”

“It is not having servants that makes a lady,” said Dora. “We are not rich.” She said this with an ineffable air of superiority to all such vulgar details. “I have never had a maid since I was quite a little thing.” She had always been herself surprised by this fact, and she expected her hearer to be surprised. “But what does that matter?” she added. “One is oneself all the same.”

“Nobody could look at you twice,” said the admiring humble friend. “And how kind of you to leave your papa and all your pretty books and come up to sit with me because I’m so lonely! It

is hard upon us to have Alfred kep' so late every night."

"Can't he help it?" said Dora. "If I were you, I should go out to meet him. The streets are so beautiful at night."

"Oh, Miss Dora!" cried the little woman, shocked. "He wouldn't have me go out by myself, not for worlds! Why, somebody might speak to me! But young girls they don't think of that. I sometimes wish I could be taken on among the young ladies in the mantle department, and then we could walk home together. But then," she added quickly, "I couldn't make him so comfortable, and then ——"

She returned to her work with a smile and a blush. She was always very full of her work, making little "things," which Dora vaguely supposed were for the shop. Their form and fashion threw no light to Dora upon the state of affairs.

“When you were in the shop, were you in the mantle department?” she asked.

“Oh, no. My figure isn’t good enough,” said Mrs. Hesketh; “you have to have a very good figure, and look like a lady. Some of the young ladies have beautiful figures, Miss Dora; and such nice black silks—as nice as any lady would wish to wear—which naturally sets them off.”

“And nothing to do?” said Dora, contemptuously. “I should not like that.”

“Oh, you! But they have a deal to do. I’ve seen ’em when they were just dropping down with tiredness. Standing about all day, and putting on mantles and things, and pretending to walk away careless to set them off. Poor things! I’d rather a deal stand behind the counter, though they’ve got the best pay.”

“Have you been reading anything to-day?” said Dora, whose attention was beginning to flag.

Mrs. Hesketh blushed a little. “I’ve scarcely



sat down all day till now; I've been having a regular clean-out. You can't think how the dust gets into all the corners with the fires and all that. And I've just been at it from morning till night. I tried to read a little bit when I had my tea. And it's a beautiful book, Miss Dora, but I was that tired."

"It can scarcely take a whole day," said Dora, looking round her, "to clean out this one little room."

"Oh, but you can't think what a lot of work there is, when you go into all the corners. And then I get tired, and it makes me stupid."

"Well," said Dora, with suppressed impatience, "but when you become a lady, as you say, with servants to do all you want, how will you be able to take up a proper position if you have never read anything?"

"Oh, as for that," said Mrs. Hesketh in a tone of relief, "that can't be for a long time yet; and

you feel different when you're old to what you do when you're young."

"But I am young," said Dora. She changed the subject, however, more or less, by her next question. "Are you really fond of sewing?" she said in an incredulous tone; "or rather, what are you most fond of? What should you like best to do?"

"Oh!" said the little wife, with large open eyes and mouth—she fell off, however, into a sigh and added, "if one ever had what one wished most!"

"And why not?" said inexperienced Dora. "At least," she added, "it's pleasant to think, even if you don't have what you want. What should you like best?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Hesketh again, but this time with a long-drawn breath of longing consciousness, "I should like that we might have enough to live upon without working, and Alfred and me always to be together,—that's what I should like best."

“Money?” cried Dora with irrepressible scorn.

“Oh, Miss Dora, money! You can’t think how nice it would be just to have enough to live on. I should never, never wish to be extravagant, or to spend more than I had; just enough for Alfred to give up the shop, and not be bound down to those long hours any more!”

“And how much might that be?” said Dora, with an air of grand yet indulgent magnificence, as if, though scorning this poor ideal, she might yet perhaps find it possible to bestow upon her friend the insignificant happiness for which she sighed.

“Oh, Miss Dora, when you think how many things are wanted in housekeeping, and one’s dress, and all that—and probably more than us,” said Mrs. Hesketh, with a bright blush. She too looked at the girl as if it might have been within Dora’s power to give the modest gift. “Should you think it a dreadful lot,” said the young woman, “if I said two hundred a year?”

“Two hundred pounds a year?” said Dora reflectively. “I think,” she added, after a pause, “father has more than twice as much as that.”

“La!” said Mrs. Hesketh; and then she made a rapid calculation, one of those efforts of mental arithmetic in which children and simple persons so often excel. “He must be saving up a lot,” she said admiringly, “for your fortune, Miss Dora. You’ll be quite an heiress with all that.”

This was an entirely new idea to Dora, who knew of heiresses only what is said in novels, where it is so easy to bestow great fortunes. “Oh no, I shall not be an heiress,” she said; “and I don’t think we save up very much. Father has always half a dozen pensioners, and he buys books and—things.” Dora had a feeling that it was something mean and bourgeois—a word which Mr. Mannering was rather apt to use—to save up.

“Oh!” said Mrs. Hesketh again, with her countenance falling. She was not a selfish or a scheming woman; but she had a romantic imagination, and it was so easy an exercise of fancy to think of this girl, who had evidently conceived such a friendship for herself, as “left” rich and solitary at the death of her delicate father, and adopting her Alfred and herself as companions and guardians. It was a sudden and passing inspiration, and the young woman meant no harm, but there was a visionary disappointment in her voice.

“But,” said Dora, with the impulse of a higher cultivation, “it is a much better thing to work than to do nothing. When father is at home for a few days, unless we go away somewhere, he gets restless; and if he were always at home he would begin some new study, and work harder than ever.”

“Ah, not with folks like us, Miss Dora,” said



Mrs. Hesketh. Then she added: "A woman has always got plenty to do. She has got her house to look after, and to see to the dinner and things. And when there are children——" Once more she paused with a blush to think over that happy prospect. "And we'd have a little garden," she said, "where Alfred could potter about, and a little trap that we could drive about in, and take me to see places, and oh, we'd be as happy as the day was long!" she cried, clasping her hands. The clock struck as she spoke, and she hastily put away her sewing and rose up. "You won't mind, Miss Dora, if I lay the table and get things ready for supper? Alfred will soon be coming now."

"Oh, I like to see you laying the table," said Dora, "and I'll help you—I can do it very well. I never let Jane touch our nice clean tablecloths. Don't you think you want a fresh one?" she said, looking doubtfully at the somewhat dingy linen.

“Father always says clean linen is the luxury of poor people.”

“Oh!” said little Mrs. Hesketh. She did not like criticism any more than the rest of us, nor did she like being identified with “poor people”. Mr. Mannering’s wise yet foolish aphorism (for how did he know how much it cost to have clean linen in Bloomsbury—or Belgravia either, for that matter?) referred to persons in his own condition, not in hers; but naturally she did not think of that. Her pride and her blood were up, however; and she went with a little hurry and vehemence to a drawer and took out a clean tablecloth. Sixpence was the cost of washing, and she could not afford to throw away sixpences, and the other one had only been used three or four times; but her pride, as I have said, was up.

“And where are the napkins?” said Dora. “I’ll lay it for you. I really like to do it: and a nicely-laid table, with the crystal sparkling, and

the silver shining, and the linen so fresh and smooth, is a very pretty object to look at, father always says."

"Oh dear! I must hurry up," cried Mrs. Hesketh; "I hear Alfred's step upon the stairs."

Now Dora did not admire Alfred, though she was fond of Alfred's wife. He brought a sniff of the shop with him, which was disagreeable to the girl; and he called her "miss," which Dora hated. She threw down the tablecloth hurriedly. "Oh, I'll leave you then," she cried, "for I'm sure he does not like to see me here when he comes in."

"Oh, Miss Dora, how can you think such a thing?" cried her friend; but she was glad of the success of her expedient when her visitor disappeared. Alfred, indeed, did not come in for half an hour after; but Mrs. Hesketh was at liberty to make her little domestic arrangements in her own way. Alfred, like herself, knew that a tablecloth cost sixpence every time it went to

the wash—which Dora, it was evident, did not do.

Dora found her father reading in exactly the same position as she had left him; he had not moved except to turn a leaf. He raised his head when she came in, and said: "I am glad you have come back, Dora. I want you to get me a book out of that bookcase in the corner. It is on the third shelf."

"And were you so lazy, father, that you would not get up to find it yourself?"

"Yes, I was so lazy," he said, with a laugh. "I get lazier and lazier every day. Besides, I like to feel that I have some one to do it for me. I am taking books out of shelves and putting them back again all the day long."

Dora put her arm on her father's shoulder, as she put down the book on the table before him. "But you like it, don't you, father? You are not tired of it?"

“Of the Museum?” he said, with a laugh and a look of surprise. “No ; I am not tired of it—any more than I am of my life.”

This was an enigmatical reply, but Dora did not attempt to fathom it. “What the little people upstairs want is just to have money enough to live on, and nothing to do,” she said.

“The little people? And what are you, Dora? You are not so very big.”

“I am growing,” said Dora, with confidence ; “and I shouldn’t like to have nothing to do all my life.”

“There is a great deal to be said for that view of the question,” said Mr. Mannering. “I am not an enthusiast for mere work, unless there is something to come out of it. ‘Know what thou canst work at’ does not apply always, unless you have to earn your living, which is often a very fortunate necessity. And even that,” he said, with a smile, “has its drawbacks.”

"It is surely far better than doing nothing," cried Dora, with her young nose in the air.

"Well, but what does it come to after all? One works to live, and consumes the fruits of one's work in the art of living. And what better is that than if you had never been? The balance would be much the same. But this is not the sort of argument for little girls, even though they are growing," Mr. Mannering said.

"I think the Museum must have been very stuffy to-day, father," was the remark which Dora made.

## CHAPTER II.

THE Mannerings lived in a house in that district of Bloomsbury which has so long meant everything that is respectable, mediocre, and dull,—at least, to that part of the world which inhabits farther West. It is possible that, regarded from the other side of the compass, Bloomsbury may be judged more justly as a city of well-sized and well-built houses, aired and opened up by many spacious breathing-places, set with stately trees. It is from this point of view that it is regarded by many persons of humble pretensions, who find large rooms and broad streets where in other districts they would only have the restricted space of respectable poverty, the weary little conventionality of the suburban cottage, or the dingy lodging-house parlours of town.

Bloomsbury is very much town indeed, surrounded on all sides by the roar of London; but it has something of the air of an individual place, a town within a town.

The pavements are wide, and so are the houses, as in the best quarter of a large provincial city. The squares have a look of seclusion, of shady walks, and retired leisure, which there is nothing to rival either in Belgravia or Mayfair. It is, or was—for it is many years since the present writer has passed over their broad pavements, or stood under the large, benignant, and stately shadow of the trees in Russell Square—a region apart, above fashion, a sober heart and centre of an older and steadier London, such as is not represented in the Row, and takes little part in the rabble and rout of fashion, the decent town of earlier days.

I do not mean to imply by this that the Mannerings lived in Russell Square, or had any



pretensions to be regarded among the magnates of Bloomsbury ; for they were poor people, quite poor, living the quietest life ; not rich enough even to have a house of their own ; mere lodgers, occupying a second floor in a house which was full of other lodgers, but where they retained the importance and dignity of having furnished their own rooms. The house was situated at the corner of a street, and thus gave them a glimpse of the trees of the Square, a view over the gardens, as the landlady described it, which was no small matter, especially from the altitude of the second floor. The small family consisted of a father and daughter—he, middle-aged, a quiet, worn, and subdued man, employed all day in the British Museum ; and she, a girl very young, yet so much older than her years that she was the constant and almost only companion of her father, to whom Dora was as his own soul, the sharer of all his thoughts, as well as the only brightness in his life.

She was but fifteen at the time when this chapter of their history begins, a creature in short frocks and long hair slightly curling on her shoulders ; taller, if we may state such a contradiction in words, than she was intended to be, or turned out in her womanhood, with long legs, long neck, long fingers, and something of the look of a soft-eyed, timid, yet playfully daring colt, flying up and down stairs as if she had wings on her shoulders, yet walking very sedately by the side of her father whenever they went out together, almost more steady and serious than he.

Mr. Mannering had the appearance of being a man who had always done well, yet never succeeded in life ; a man with a small income, and no chance of ever bettering himself, as people say, or advancing in the little hierarchy of the great institution which he served meekly and diligently in the background, none of its promotions ever reaching him.

Scarcely any one, certainly none out of that institution, knew that there had been a period in which this gentle and modest life had almost been submerged under the bitterest wave, and in which it had almost won the highest honours possible to a man of such pursuits. This was an old story, and even Dora knew little of it. He had done so much at that forgotten and troubled time, that, had he been a rich man like Darwin, and able to retire and work in quiet the discoveries he had made, and the experiences he had attained, Robert Mannering's name might have been placed in the rolls of fame as high as that of his more fortunate contemporary.

But he was poor when he returned from the notable wanderings during the course of which he had been given up as dead for years, poor and heartbroken, and desiring nothing but the dimmest corner in which to live out his broken days, and just enough to live upon to bring up his little

daughter, and to endure his existence, his duty to God and to Dora forbidding him to make an end of it.

It would be giving an altogether false idea of the man with whom this book is to be much occupied, to say that he had continued in this despairing frame of mind. God and Dora—the little gift of God—had taken care of that. The little girl had led him back to a way which, if not brilliant or prosperous, was like a field-path through many humble flowers, sweet with the air and breath of nature. Sooth to say, it was no field-path at all, but led chiefly over the pavements of Bloomsbury; yet the simple metaphor was not untrue.

Thus he lived, and did his work dutifully day by day. No headship of a department, no assistant keepership for him; yet much esteem and consideration among his peers, and a constant reference, whenever anything in his special sphere was

wanted, to his boundless information and knowledge. Sometimes a foreign inquirer would come eager to seek him, as the best and highest authority on this subject, to the consternation of the younger men in other branches, who could not understand how anybody could believe "old Mannering" to be of consequence in the place ; but generally his life was as obscure as he wished it to be, yet not any hard or painful drudgery ; for he was still occupied with the pursuit which he had chosen, and which he had followed all his life ; and he was wise enough to recognise and be thankful for the routine which held his broken existence together, and had set up again, after his great disaster, his framework as a man.

Dora knew nothing of any disaster ; and this was good for him too, bringing him back to nature. " A cheerful man I am in life," he might have said with Thackeray, who also had good reason for being sad enough. A man who has

for his chief society a buoyant, curious, new spirit, still trailing clouds of glory from her origin, still only making acquaintance with things of earth, curious about everything, asking a thousand penetrating questions, awakening a mood of interest everywhere, can scarcely be otherwise than cheerful.

The second floor at the corner of the Square which was inhabited by this pair consisted of three rooms, all good-sized and airy ; the sitting-room being indeed spacious, larger than any two which could have been found in a fashionable nook in Mayfair. It was furnished, in a manner very unexpected by such chance visitors as did not know the character of the inhabitants, with furniture which would not have been out of place in Belgravia, or in a fine lady's drawing-room anywhere, mingled strangely with certain plain pieces put in for evident use.

A square and sturdy table occupied the por-

tion of the room which was nearest to the door, with the clearest utility, serving for the meals of the father and daughter, while the other part of the room, partially separated by a stamped leather screen, had an air of subdued luxury, a little faded, yet unmistakable. The curtains were of heavy brocade, which had a little lost their colour, or rather gained those shadings and reflections which an artist loves; but hung with the softness of their silken fabric, profoundly unlike the landlady's nice fresh crimson rep which adorned the windows of the first floor. There was an Italian inlaid cabinet against the farther wall, which held the carefully prepared sheets of a herbarium, which Mr. Mannering had collected from all the ends of the earth, and which was of sufficient value to count for much in the spare inheritance which he meant for his only child. The writing-table, at which Dora had learned to make her first pot-hooks, was a piece of beautiful

*marqueterie*, the oldest and most graceful of its kind.

But I need not go round the room and make a catalogue of the furniture. It settled quite kindly into the second floor in Bloomsbury, with that grace which the nobler kind of patrician, subdued by fortune, lends to the humblest circumstances, which he accepts with patience and goodwill. Mr. Mannering himself had never been a handsome man ; and all the colour and brightness of youth had died out of him, though he was still in the fulness of middle age. But the ivory tone of his somewhat sharply cut profile and the premature stoop of his shoulders suited his surroundings better than a more vigorous personality would have done.

Dora, in her half-grown size and bigness, with her floating hair and large movements, seemed to take up a great deal more space than her father ; and it was strange that she did not knock down



more frequently the pretty old-fashioned things, and the old books which lay upon the little tables, or even those tables themselves, as she whisked about ; but they knew Dora, and she knew them. She had spent a great part of every day alone with them, as long as she could remember, playing with those curiosities that lay upon them, while she was a child, in the long, silent, dreamy hours, when she was never without amusement, though as constantly alone.

Since she had grown older, she had taken pleasure in dusting them and arranging them, admiring the toys of old silver, and the carved ivories and trifles of all kinds, from the ends of the earth. It was her great pleasure on the Sunday afternoons, when her father was with her, to open the drawers of the cabinet and bring out the sheets of the herbarium so carefully arranged and classified. Her knowledge, perhaps, was not very scientific, but it was accurate in detail, and in what may be

called locality in the highest degree. She knew what family abode in what drawer, and all its ramifications. These were more like neighbours to Dora, lodged in surrounding houses, than specimens in drawers. She knew all about them, where they came from, and their genealogy, and which were the grand-parents, and which the children; and, still more interesting, in what jungle or marsh her father had found them, and which of them came from the African deserts in which he had once been lost.

By degrees she had found out much about that wonderful episode in his life, and had become vaguely aware, which was the greatest discovery of all, that it contained many things which she had not found out, and perhaps never would. She knew even how to lead him to talk about it, which had to be very skilfully done—for he was shy of the subject when assailed openly, and often shrank from the very name of Africa as if it stung him;

while on other occasions, led on by some train of thought in his own mind, he would fall into long lines of recollections, and tell her of the fever attacks, one after another, which had laid him low, and how the time had gone over him like a dream, so that he never knew till long after how many months, and even years, he had lost.

Where was the mother all this time, it may be asked? Dora knew no more of this part of her history than if she had come into the world without need of any such medium, like Minerva from her father's head.

It is difficult to find out from the veiled being of a little child what it thinks upon such a subject, or if it is aware at all, when it has never been used to any other state of affairs, of the strange vacancy in its own life. Dora never put a single question to her father on this point; and he had often asked himself whether her mind was dead to all that side of life which she had never known, or whether

some instinct kept her silent ; and had satisfied himself at last that, as she knew scarcely any other children, the want in her own life had not struck her imagination. Indeed, the grandchildren of Mrs. Simcox, the landlady, were almost the only children Dora had ever known familiarly, and they, like herself, had no mother, they had granny ; and Dora had inquired of her father about her own granny, who was dead long ago.

“ You have only me, my poor little girl,” he had said. But Dora had been quite satisfied.

“ Janie and Molly have no papa,” she answered, with a little pride. It was a great superiority, and made up for everything, and she inquired no more. Nature, Mr. Mannering knew, was by no means so infallible as we think her. He did not know, however, what is a still more recondite and profound knowledge, what secret things are in a child’s heart.

I have known a widowed mother who

wondered sadly for years why her children showed so little interest and asked no questions about their father ; and then found out, from the lips of one grown into full manhood, what visions had been wrapt about that unknown image, and how his portrait had been the confidant of many a little secret trouble hidden even from herself. But Dora had not even a portrait to give embodiment to any wistful thoughts. Perhaps it was to her not merely that her mother was dead, but that she had never been. Perhaps—but who knows the questions that arise in that depth profound, the heart of a child ?

It was not till Dora was fifteen that she received the great shock, yet revelation, of discovering the portrait of a lady in her father's room.

Was it her mother ? She could not tell. It was the portrait of a young lady, which is not a child's ideal of a mother. It was hidden away in

a secret drawer of which she had discovered the existence only by a chance in the course of some unauthorised investigations among Mr. Manner-ing's private properties.

He had lost something which Dora was intent on surprising him by finding ; and this was what led her to these investigations. It was in a second Italian cabinet which was in his bedroom, an inferior specimen to that in the drawing-room, but one more private, about which her curiosity had never been awakened. He kept handkerchiefs, neckties, uninteresting items of personal use in it, which Dora was somewhat carelessly turning over, when by accident the secret spring was touched, and the drawer flew open. In this there was a miniature case which presented a very strange spectacle when Dora, a little excited, opened it. There seemed to be nothing but a blank at first, until, on further examination, Dora found that the miniature had been turned face

downwards in its case. It may be imagined with what eager curiosity she continued her investigations.

The picture, as has been said, was that of a young lady—quite a young lady, not much older, Dora thought, than herself. Who could this girl be? Her mother? But that girlish face could not belong to any girl's mother. It was not beautiful to Dora's eyes; but yet full of vivacity and interest, a face that had much to say if one only knew its language; with dark, bright eyes, and a tremulous smile about the lips. Who was it; oh, who was it? Was it that little sister of papa's who was dead, whose name had been Dora too? Was it ——

Dora did not know what to think, or how to explain the little shock which was given her by this discovery. She shut up the drawer hastily, but she had not the heart to turn the portrait again as it had been turned, face downwards. It

seemed too unkind, cruel almost. Why should her face be turned downwards, that living, smiling face? "I will ask papa," Dora said to herself; but she could not tell why it was, any more than she could explain her other sensations on the subject, that when the appropriate moment came to do so, she had not the courage to ask papa.



### CHAPTER III.

THERE was one remarkable thing in Dora Man-  
nering's life which I have omitted to mention,  
which is, that she was in the habit of receiving  
periodically, though at very uncertain intervals,  
out of that vast but vague universe surrounding  
England, which we call generally "abroad," a  
box. No one knew where it came from, or  
who it came from; at least, no light was ever  
thrown to Dora upon that mystery. It was  
despatched now from one place, now from an-  
other; and not a name, or a card, or a scrap  
of paper was ever found to identify the sender.

This box contained always a store of delights  
for the recipient, who, though she was in a man-  
ner monarch of all she surveyed, was without  
many of the more familiar pleasures of childhood.

It had contained toys and pretty knick-knacks of many quaint foreign kinds when she was quite a child ; but as she grew older, the mind of her unknown friend seemed to follow her growth with the strangest certainty of what would please these advancing youthful years.

The foundation of the box, if that word may be employed, was always a store of the daintiest underclothing, delicately made, which followed Dora's needs and growth, growing longer as she grew taller ; so that underneath her frocks, which were not always lovely, the texture, form, and colour being chiefly decided by the dressmaker who had "made" for her as long as she could remember, Dora was clothed like a princess ; and thus accustomed from her childhood to the most delicate and dainty accessories—fine linen, fine wool, silk stockings, handkerchiefs good enough for any fine lady. Her father had not, at first, liked to see these fine things ; he had pushed

them away when she spread them out to show him her treasures, and turned his back upon her, bidding her carry off her trumpery.

It was so seldom, so very seldom, that Mr. Mannering had an objection to anything done by Dora, that this little exhibition of temper had an extraordinary effect ; but the interval between one arrival and another was long enough to sweep any such recollection out of the mind of a child ; and as she grew older, more intelligent to note what he meant, and, above all, more curious about everything that happened, he had changed his tone. But he had a look which Dora classified in her own mind as “ the face father puts on when my box comes ”.

This is a sort of thing which imprints itself very clearly upon the mind of the juvenile spectator and critic. Dora knew it as well as she knew the clothes her father wore, or the unchanging habits of his life, though she did not for a long

time attempt to explain to herself what it meant. It was a look of intent self-restraint, of a stoical repression. He submitted to having the different contents of the box exhibited to him without a smile on his face or the least manifestation of sympathy—he who sympathised with every sentiment which breathed across his child's facile spirit. He wound himself up to submit to the ordeal, it seemed, with the blank look of an unwilling spectator, who has not a word of admiration for anything, and, indeed, hates the sight he cannot refuse to see.

“Who can send them, father? oh, who can send them? Who is it that remembers me like this, and that I'm growing, and what I must want, and everything? I was only a child when the last one came. You must know—you must know, father! How could any one know about me and not know you—or care for me?” Dora cried, with a little moisture springing to her eyes.

“I have already told you I don’t know anything about it,” said Mr. Mannering, oh, with such a shut-up face! closing the shutters upon his eyes and drawing down all the blinds, as Dora said.

“Well, but suppose you don’t know, you must guess; you must imagine who it could be. No one could know me, and not know you. I am not a stranger that you have nothing to do with. You must know who is likely to take so much thought about your daughter. Why, she knows my little name! There is ‘Dora’ on my handkerchiefs.”

He turned away with a short laugh. “You seem to have found out a great deal for yourself. How do you know it is ‘she’? It might be some old friend of mine who knew that my only child was Dora—and perhaps that I was not a man to think of a girl’s wants.”

“It may be an old friend of yours, father. It

must be, for who would know about me but a friend of yours? But how could it be a man? It couldn't be a man! A man could never work 'Dora'——"

"You little simpleton! He would go to a shop and order it to be worked. I daresay it is Wallace, who is out in South America."

Such a practical suggestion made Dora pause; but it was not at all an agreeable idea. "Mr. Wallace! an old, selfish, dried-up ——" Then with a cry of triumph she added: "But they came long, long before he went to South America. No—I know one thing—that it is a lady. No one but a lady could tell what a girl wants. You don't, father, though you know me through and through; and how could any other man? But I suppose you have had friends ladies as well as men?"

His closed-up lips melted a little. "Not many," he said; then they shut up fast again.

“It may be,” he said reluctantly, with a face from which all feeling was shut out, which looked like wood, “a friend—of your mother’s.”

“Oh, of mamma’s!” The girl’s countenance lit up; she threw back her head and her waving hair, conveying to the man who shrank from her look the impression as of a thing with wings. He had been of opinion that she had never thought upon this subject, never considered the side of life thus entirely shut out from her experience, and had wondered even while rejoicing at her insensibility. But when he saw the light on her face he shrank, drawing back into himself. “Oh,” cried Dora, “a friend of my mother’s! Oh, father, she must have died long, long ago, that I never remember her. Oh, tell me, who can this friend be?”

He had shut himself up again more closely than ever—not only were there shutters at all the windows, but they were bolted and barred with

iron. His face was more blank than any piece of wood. "I never knew much of her friends," he said.

"Mother's friends!" the girl cried, with a half shriek of reproachful wonder. And then she added quickly: "But think, father, think! You will remember somebody if you will only try."

"Dora," he said, "you don't often try my patience, and you had better not begin now. I should like to throw all that trumpery out of the window, but I don't, for I feel I have no right to deprive you of —— Your mother's friends were not mine. I don't feel inclined to think as you bid me. The less one thinks the better—— on some subjects. I must ask you to question me no more."

"But, father ——"

"I have said that I will be questioned no more."

"It wasn't a question," said the girl, almost sullenly; and then she clasped her hands about



his arm with a sudden impulse. "Father, if you don't like it, I'll put them all away. I'll never think of them nor touch them again."

The wooden look melted away, his features quivered for a moment. He stooped and kissed her on the forehead. "No," he said, making an effort to keep his lips firmly set as before. "No; I have no right to do that. No; I don't wish it. Keep them and wear them, and take pleasure in them; but don't speak to me on the subject again."

This conversation took place on the occasion of a very special novelty in the mysterious periodical present which she had just received, about which it was impossible to keep silence. The box—"my box," as Dora had got to call it—contained, in addition to everything else, a dress, which was a thing that had never been sent before.

It was a white dress, made with great simplicity, as became Dora's age, but also in a costly way, a semi-transparent white, the sort of stuff

which could be drawn through a ring, as happens in fairy tales, and was certainly not to be bought in ordinary English shops. To receive anything so unexpected, so exciting, so beautiful, and not to speak of it, to exhibit it to some one, was impossible. Dora had not been able to restrain herself. She had carried it in her arms out of her room, and opened it out upon a sofa in the sitting-room for her father's inspection. There are some things which we know beforehand will not please, and yet which we are compelled to do; and this was the consciousness in Dora's mind, who, besides her delight in the gift, and her desire to be able to find out something about the donor, had also, it must be allowed, a burning desire to make discoveries as to that past of which she knew so little, which had seized upon her mind from the moment when she had found the portrait turned upon its face in the secret drawer of her father's cabinet. As she withdrew now,

again carrying in her arms the beautiful dress, there was in her mind, underneath a certain compunction for having disturbed her father, and sympathy with him so strong that she would actually have been capable of sacrificing her newly-acquired possessions, a satisfaction half-mischievous, half-affectionate, in the discoveries which she had made. They were certainly discoveries ; sorry as she was to “upset father,” there was yet a consciousness in her mind that this time it had been worth the while.

The reader may not think any better of Dora for this confession ; but there is something of the elf in most constitutions at fifteen, and she was not of course at all sensible at that age of the pain that might lie in souvenirs so ruthlessly stirred up. And she had indeed made something by them. Never, never again, she promised herself, would she worry father with questions ; but so far as the present occasion went, she could

scarcely be sorry, for had not she learned much—enough to give her imagination much employment? She carried away her discoveries with her, as she carried her dress, to realise them in the shelter of her own room. They seemed to throw a vivid light upon that past in which her own life was so much involved. She threw the dress upon her bed carelessly, these other new thoughts having momentarily taken the interest out of even so exciting a novelty as that; and arranged in shape and sequence what she had found out. Well, it was not so much, after all. What seemed most clear in it was that father had not been quite friends with mother, or at least with mother's friends. Perhaps these friends had made mischief between them—perhaps she had cared for them more than for her husband; but surely that was not possible. And how strange, how strange it was that he should keep up such a feeling so long!

As Dora did not remember her mother, it was evident that she must have been dead many, many years. And yet her father still kept up his dislike to her friends! It threw a new light even upon him, whom she knew better than any one. Dora felt that she knew her father thoroughly, every thought that was in his mind; and yet here it would seem that she did not know him at all. So good a man, who was never hard with anybody, who forgave her, Dora, however naughty she might have been, as soon as she asked pardon; who forgave old Mr. Warrender for contradicting him about that orchid, the orchid that was called *Manneringii*, and which father had discovered, and therefore must know best; who forgave Mrs. Simcox when she swept the dust from the corners upon the herbarium and spoilt some of the specimens; and yet who in all these years had never forgiven the unknown persons, who were mother's friends, some one of whom

must be nice indeed, or she never would go on remembering Dora, and sending her such presents. What could he have against this unknown lady,—this nice, nice woman? And how was it possible that he should have kept it up in his mind, and never forgiven it, or forgotten all these years? It made Dora wonder, and feel, though she crushed the feeling firmly, that perhaps father was not so perfect as she had thought.

And then there was this lady to think of—her mother's friend, who had kept on all this time thinking of Dora. She would not have been more than a baby when this benefactress saw her last, since Dora did not remember either mother, or mother's friend; yet she must recollect just how old Dora was, must have guessed just about how tall she was, and kept count how she had grown from one time to another. The beautiful dress was just almost long enough, almost fitted her in every way. It gave the girl a keen touch of

pleasure to think that she was just a little taller and slighter than her unknown friend supposed her to be—but so near; the letting down of a hem, the narrowing of a seam, and it would be a perfect fit. How foolish father must be to think that Mr. Wallace, or any other man, would have thought of that! Her mother's friend—what a kind friend, what a constant friend, though father did not like her!

It overawed Dora a little to think if ever this lady came home, what would happen? Of course, she would wish to see the girl whom she had remembered so long, whom she had befriended so constantly; and what if father would not permit it? It would be unkind, ungrateful, wrong; but what if father objected, if it made him unhappy? Dora did not see her way through this dreadful complication. It was sufficiently hard upon her, a girl at so early an age, to become the possessor of a beautiful dress like this, and have no one to

show it to, to talk it over with ; nobody even to tell her exactly how it fitted, to judge what was necessary for its perfection, as Dora herself, with no experience, and not even a good glass to see herself in, could scarcely do. To hide a secret of any kind in one's being at fifteen is a difficult thing ; but when that secret is a frock, a dress !—a robe, indeed, she felt it ought to be called, it was so exquisite, so poetical in its fineness and whiteness. Dora had no one to confide in ; and if she had possessed a thousand confidants, would not have said a word to them which would seem to involve her father in any blame. She put her pretty dress away, however, with a great sense of discomfiture and downfall. Perhaps he would dislike to see her wear it, even if she had ever any need for a beautiful dress like that. But she never had any need. She never went anywhere, or saw anybody. A whole host of little grievances came up in the train of that greater one. She



wondered if she were to spend all her life like this, without ever tasting those delights of society which she had read of, without ever knowing any one of her own age, without ever seeing people dance, or hearing them sing. As for performing in these ways herself, that had not come into Dora's mind. She would like, she thought, to look on and see how they did it, for once, at least, in her life.

When she had come to this point, Dora, who was a girl full of natural sense, began to feel instinctively that she was not in a good way, and that it would be better to do something active to clear away the cobwebs. It was evening, however, and she did not know exactly what to do. To go back to the sitting-room where her father was reading, and to sit down also to read at his side, seemed an ordeal too much for her after the excitement of their previous talk ; but it was what probably she would have been compelled to do, had she not heard a heavy step mounting the

stairs, the sound of a knock at the door, and her father's voice bidding some one enter.

She satisfied herself presently that it was the voice of one of Mr. Mannering's chief friends, a colleague from the Museum, and that he was safe for a time not to remark her absence or to have urgent need for her. What now should Dora do? The openings of amusement were small. Mrs. Hesketh had been exhausted for the moment. It must be said that Dora was free of the whole house, and that she used her *petites entrées* in the most liberal and democratic fashion, thinking no scorn of going downstairs sometimes to the funny little room next to the kitchen, which Mrs. Simcox called the breakfast-room, and used as her own sanctum, the family centre where her grandchildren and herself found refuge out of the toils of the kitchen. The kitchen itself remained in the possession of Jane; and Jane, like her mistress, occasionally shared the patronage of

Miss Dora. To-night perhaps she wanted solace of another kind from any which could be given her on the basement story. It is not often that a young person in search of entertainment or sympathy has all the gradations of the social system to choose from. The first floor represented the aristocracy in the establishment at Bloomsbury. It was occupied by a Scotch lady, a certain Miss Bethune, a somewhat harsh-featured and angular person, hiding a gentle heart under a grim exterior; but a little intolerant in her moods, and not always sure to respond to overtures of friendship; with a maid not much less unlike the usual denizens of Bloomsbury than herself, but beaming with redness and good humour, and one of Dora's chief worshippers in the house. When the girl felt that her needs required the sympathy of a person of the highest, *i.e.*, her own class, she went either boldly or with strategy to the drawing-room floor. She had

thus the power of drawing upon the fellowship of her kind in whatever way the temper of the time adapted it best for her.

Mrs. Simcox and the girls downstairs, and Mrs. Hesketh above, would have been lost in raptures over Dora's new dress. They would have stared, they would perhaps have touched with a timid finger, they would have opened their eyes and their mouths and cried: "Oh!" or "La!" or "Well, I never!" But they would not have understood. One's own kind, Dora felt, was necessary for that. But as it was evening, and Miss Bethune was not always gracious, she did not boldly walk up to her door, but lingered about on the stairs, coming and going, until, as was pretty sure to occur, Gilchrist, the maid, with her glowing moon face and her sandy locks, came out of the room. Gilchrist brightened immediately at the sight of the favourite of the house.

"Oh, is that you, Miss Dora? Come in and

see my lady, and cheer her up. She's not in the best of spirits to-night."

"Neither am I—in the best of spirits," said Dora.

"You!" cried Gilchrist, with what she herself would have called a "skreigh" of laughter. She added sympathetically: "You'll may be have been getting a scold from your papaw".

"My father never scolds," said Dora, with dignity.

"Bless me! but that's the way when there's but wan child," said Miss Bethune's maid: "not always, though," she added, with a deep sigh that waved aloft her own cap-strings, and caught Dora's hair like a breeze. The next moment she opened the door and said, putting her head in: "Here's Miss Dora, mem, to cheer you up a bit: but no' in the best of spirits hersel'".

"Bless me!" repeated Miss Bethune from within: "and what is wrong with her spirits?"

Come away, Dora, come in." Both mistress and maid had, as all the house was aware, curious modes of expressing themselves, which were Scotch, though nobody was aware in Bloomsbury how that quality affected the speech—in Miss Bethune's case at least. The lady was tall and thin, a large framework of a woman which had never filled out. She sat in a large chair near the fire, between which and her, however, a screen was placed. She held up a fan before her face to screen off the lamp, and consequently her countenance was in full shadow. She beckoned to the girl with her hand, and pointed to a seat beside her. "So you are in low spirits, Dora? Well, I'm not very bright myself. Come and let us mingle our tears."

"You are laughing at me, Miss Bethune. You think I have no right to feel anything."

"On the contrary, my dear. I think at your age there are many things that a girl feels—too

much ; and though they're generally nonsense, they're just as disagreeable as if they were the best of sense. Papa a little cross?"

"Why should you all think anything so preposterous? My father is never cross," cried Dora, with tears of indignation in her eyes.

"The better for him, my dear, much the better for him," said Miss Bethune ; "but, perhaps, rather the worse for you. That's not my case, for I am just full of irritability now and then, and ready to quarrel with the tables and chairs. Well, you are cross yourself, which is much worse. And yet I hear you had one of your grand boxes to-day, all full of bonnie-dies. What a lucky little girl you are to get presents like that!"

"I am not a little girl, Miss Bethune."

"No, I'll allow you're a very big one for your age. Come, Dora, tell me what was in the box this time. It will do you good."

Dora hesitated a little to preserve her dignity,

and then she said almost with awe : " There was a dress in it".

" A dress!" cried Miss Bethune, with a little shriek of surprise ; " and does it fit you?"

" It's just a very, very little bit too short," said Dora, with pride, " and just a very, very little bit too wide at the waist."

" Run and bring it, and let me see it," cried the lady. " I've no doubt in the world it fits like a glove. Gilchrist, come in, come in, and see what the bairn's got. A frock that fits her like a glove."

" Just a very, very little too short, and a very, very little too wide in the waist," said Dora, repeating her formula. She had flown upstairs after the first moment's hesitation, and brought it back in her arms, glad in spite of herself to be thus delivered from silence and the sense of neglect.

" Eh, mem," cried Gilchrist, " but it must be



an awfu', awfu' faithful woman that has minded how a lassie like that grows and gets big, and just how big she gets, a' thae years."

"There ye are with your moral!" cried the mistress; and to Dora's infinite surprise tears were on her cheeks. "It's just the lassie that makes all the difference," said Miss Bethune. She flung the pretty dress from her, and then she rose up suddenly and gave Dora a hasty kiss. "Put it on and let me see it," she said; "I will wager you anything it just fits like a glove."

## CHAPTER IV.

“THAT is a very strange business of these Mannerings, Gilchrist,” said Miss Bethune to her maid, when Dora, excited by praise and admiration, and forgetting all her troubles, had retired to her own habitation upstairs, escorted, she and her dress, by Gilchrist, who could not find it in her heart, as she said, to let a young thing like that spoil her bonnie new frock by not putting it properly away. Gilchrist laid the pretty dress lovingly in a roomy drawer, smoothing out all its creases by soft pats of her accustomed hands, and then returned to her mistress to talk over the little incident of the evening.

Miss Bethune's spirits were improved also by that little exhibition. What a thing it is to be able to draw a woman softly out of her troubles

by the sight of a pretty child in a pretty new dress ! Contemptible the love of clothes, the love of finery, and so forth, let the philosophers say. To me there is something touching in that natural instinct which relieves for a moment now and then the heaviest pressure. Dora's new frock had nothing to do with any gratification of Miss Bethune's vanity ; but it brought a little dawning ray of momentary light into her room, and a little distraction from the train of thoughts that were not over bright. No man could feel the same for the most beautiful youth ever introduced in raiment like the day. Let us be thankful among all our disabilities for a little simple pleasure, now and then, that is common to women only. Boy or girl, it scarcely matters which, when they come in dressed in their best, all fresh and new, the sight pleases the oldest, the saddest of us—a little unconsidered angel-gift, amid the dimness and the darkness of the every-day world. Miss

Bethune to outward aspect was a little grim, an old maid, as people said, apart from the sympathies of life. But the dull evening and the pressure of many thoughts had been made bright to her by Dora's new frock.

"What business, mem?" asked Gilchrist.

"If ever there was a living creature slow at the uptake, and that could not see a pikestaff when it is set before your eyes!" cried Miss Bethune. "What's the meaning of it all, you stupid woman? Who's that away in the unknown that sends all these bonnie things to that motherless bairn?—and remembers the age she is, and when she's grown too big for dolls, and when she wants a frock that will set her off, that she could dance in and sing in, and make her little curtsy to the world? No, she's too young for that; but still the time's coming, and fancy goes always a little before."

"Eh, mem," said Gilchrist, "that is just what

I have askit mysel'—that's just what I was saying. It's some woman, that's the wan thing ; but what woman could be so thoughtful as that, aye minding just what was wanted?" She made a gesture with her hands as if in utter inability to divine, but her eyes were fixed all the time very wistfully on her mistress's face.

"You need not look at me like that," the lady said.

"I was looking at you, mem, not in any particklar way."

"If you think you can make a fool of me at the present period of our history, you're far mistaken," said Miss Bethune. "I know what you were meaning. You were comparing her with me, not knowing either the one or the other of us—though you have been my woman, and more near me than anybody on earth these five-and-twenty long years."

"And more, mem, and more !" cried Gilchrist,

with a flow of tears, which were as natural to her as her spirit. "Eh, I was but a young, young lass, and you a bonnie ——"

"Hold your peace!" said Miss Bethune, with an angry raising of her hand; and then her voice wavered and shook a little, and a tremulous laugh came forth. "I was never a bonnie—anything, ye auld fool! and that you know as well as me."

"But, mem ——"

"Hold your peace, Gilchrist! We were never anything to brag of, either you or me. Look in your glass, woman, if you don't believe me. A couple of plain women, very plain women, mistress and maid."

This was said with a flash of hazel eyes which gave a half-humorous contradiction at the same moment to the assertion. Gilchrist began to fold hems upon the apron with which she had just dried her tears.

"I never said," she murmured, with a down-

cast head, "a word about mysel',—that's no' a woman's part. If there's nobody that speaks up for her she has just to keep silence, if she was the bonniest woman in the world."

"The auld fool! because there was once a silly lad that had nobody else to come courting to! No, Gilchrist, my woman, you were never bonnie. A white skin, I allow, to go with your red hair, and a kind of innocent look in your eyes,—nothing, nothing more! We were both plain women, you and me, not adapted to please the eyes of men."

"They might have waited long afore we would have tried, either the wan or the other of us," cried Gilchrist, with a flash of self-assertion. "No' that I would even mysel' to you, mem," she added in an after breath.

"As for that, it's a metaphysical question," said Miss Bethune. "I will not attempt to enter into it. But try or no', it is clear we did not

succeed. And what it is that succeeds is just more than I can tell. It's not beauty, it's a kind of natural attraction." She paused a moment in this deep philosophical inquiry, and then said quickly : "All this does not help us to find out what is this story about the Mannerings. Who is the woman? Is it somebody that loves the man, or somebody that loves the girl?"

"If you would take my opinion, mem, I would say that the man—if ye call Mr. Mannering, honest gentleman, the man, that has just every air of being a well-born person, and well-bred, and not a common person at all——"

"You haveral! The king himself, if there was a king, could be no more than a man."

"I would say, mem, that it was not for him—oh, no' for him, except maybe in opposition, if you could fancy that. Supposing," said Gilchrist, raising her arm in natural eloquence, "supposin' such a thing as that there should be a bonnie bairn



like Miss Dora between two folk that had broken with one another—and it was the man, not the woman, that had her. I could just fancy,” said the maid, her brown eyes lighting, her milky yet freckled complexion flushing over,—“I could just fancy that woman pouring out everything at the bairn’s feet—gold and silver and grand presents, and a’ the pomps of this world, partly out of an adoration for her hersel’, partly just to make the man set his teeth at her that was away—maybe, in the desert—unknown!”

Gilchrist stood like a sibyl making this picture flash and gleam before her own inward vision with a heat and passion that seemed quite uncalled for in the circumstances. What was Hecuba to her, or she to Hecuba, that she should be so inspired by the possibilities of a mystery with which she had nothing to do? Her eloquence brought a corresponding glow, yet cloud, over the countenance of her mistress, who sat and listened with

her head leaning on her hand, and for some time said nothing. She broke the silence at last with a laugh in which there was very little sound of mirth.

“You are a limited woman,” she said—“a very limited woman. You can think of no state of affairs but one, and that so uncommon that perhaps there never was a case in the world like it. You will never be done, I know that, taking up your lesson out of it—all to learn one that has neither need to learn nor wish to learn—a thing that *is* impossible. Mind you what I say, and be done with this vain endeavour. Whatever may be the meaning of this Mannering business, it has no likeness to the other. And I am not a person to be schooled by the like of you, or to be taught in parables by my own woman, as if I was a person of no understanding, and her a mistress of every knowledge.”

Miss Bethune rose hurriedly from her seat,

and made a turn about the room with an air of high excitement and almost passion. Then she came and stood before the fire, leaning on the mantelpiece, looking down upon the blaze with a face that seemed to be coloured by the reflection. Finally, she put out a long arm, caught Gilchrist by the shoulders, who stood softly crying, as was her wont, within reach, and drew her close. "You've been with me through it all," she said suddenly ; "there's nobody that knows me but you. Whatever you say, it's you only that knows what is in my heart. I bear you no ill-will for any word you say, no' for any word you say ; and the Lord forgive me if maybe all this time it is you that has been right and me that has been wrong !" Only a moment, scarcely so much, Miss Bethune leant her head upon Gilchrist's shoulder, then she suddenly pushed her away. And not a second too soon, for at that moment a knock came to the door. They both started a

little; and Miss Bethune, with the speed of thought, returned to the chair shaded by a screen from the lamplight and firelight in which she had been sitting, "not in good spirits," at the time of the interruption of Dora. "Go and see who it is," she said, half in words, half by the action of her hand. Nothing could have been more instantaneous than this rapid change.

When Gilchrist, scarcely less rapid though so much heavier than her mistress, opened the door, there stood before it a little man very carefully dressed, though in morning costume, in a solemn frock coat, with his hat in his hand. Though professional costume no longer exists among us, it was impossible not to feel and recognise in a moment that nothing but a medical man, a doctor to the tips of his fingers, could have appeared in just that perfect neatness of dress, so well brushed, so exactly buttoned, so gravely clothed in garments which, though free of any peculiarity of art or

colour, such as that which distinguishes the garb of a clergyman, were yet so completely and seriously professional. His whiskers, for it was in the days when these ornaments were still worn, his hair, brown, with a slight crisp and upturning, like lining, of grey, the watch-chain that crossed his waistcoat, as well as the accurate chronometer of a watch to which so many eager and so many languid pulses had beat, were all in perfect keeping; even his boots—but we must not pursue too far this discussion of Dr. Roland's personal appearance. His boots were not the polished leather of the evening; but they were the spotless boots of a man who rarely walked, and whose careful step from his carriage to a patient's door never carried in any soil of the outside to the most delicate carpet. Why, being one of the inhabitants of this same house in Bloomsbury, he should have carried his hat in his hand when he came to the door of Miss Bethune's drawing-room

from his own sitting-room downstairs, is a mystery upon which I can throw no light.

The ideas of a man in respect to his hat are indeed unfathomable. Whether he carries it as a protection or a shield of pretence, whether to convey to you that he is anxiously expected somewhere else, and that you are not to calculate upon anything but a short appearance upon your individual scene, whether to make it apparent by its gloss and sheen how carefully he has prepared for this interview, whether it is to keep undue familiarity at arm's length, or provide a becoming occupation for those hands with which many persons, while in repose, do not know what to do, it is impossible to tell. Certain it is that a large number of men find consolation and support in the possession of that article of apparel; and though they may freely abuse it in other circumstances, cling to it on social occasions as to an instrument of salvation. Dr. Roland held it fast,

and bowed over it with a little formality, as he came into his neighbour's presence. They met on the stairs or in the hall sometimes three or four times in a day, but they were not the less particular in going through all the forms of civility when the doctor came to pay a call, as if they had not seen each other for a week before.

He was a man of very great observation, and he did not miss a single particular of the scene. The screen drawn round the lady, defending her not only from the fire but from inspection, and a slight glistening upon the cheek of Gilchrist, which, as she did not paint or use any cosmetic, had but one explanation. That he formed a completely wrong conclusion was not Dr. Roland's fault. He did so sometimes from lack of material on which to form his judgment, but not often. He said to himself, "There has been a row," which, as the reader is aware, was not the case ; but then he set himself to work to smooth down all agita-

tion with a kindness and skill which the gentlest reader, knowing all about it, could not have surpassed.

“We have just been doing a very wrong thing, Gilchrist and me,” said Miss Bethune; “a thing which you will say, doctor, is the way of ladies and their maids; but that is just one of your generalisings, and not true—except now and then. We have been wondering what is the strange story of our bonnie little Dora and that quiet, learned father of hers upstairs.”

“Very natural, I should say,” said the doctor. “But why should there be any story at all? I don’t wonder at the discussion, but why should there be any cause for it? A quiet, learned man, as you say, and one fair daughter and no more, whom he loves passing well.”

“Ah, doctor,” said Miss Bethune, “you know a great deal about human nature. You know better than that.”



The doctor put down his hat, and drew his chair nearer the fire. “Should you like to hear the story of poor Mannering?” he said.

## CHAPTER V.

THERE is nothing more usual than to say that could we but know the life history of the first half-dozen persons we meet with on any road, we should find tragic details and unexpected lights and shadows far beyond the reach of fiction, which no doubt is occasionally true: though probably the first half-dozen would be found to gasp, like the knife-grinder: "Story? Lord bless you! I have none to tell, sir." This, to be sure, would be no argument; for our histories are not frequently unknown to, or, at least, unappreciated by ourselves, and the common human sense is against any accumulation of wonders in a small space. I am almost ashamed to say that the two people who inhabited one above the other two separate floors of my house in Bloomsbury, had a certain singu-

larity and unusualness in their lives, that they were not as other men or women are; or, to speak more clearly, that being as other men and women are, the circumstances of their lives created round them an atmosphere which was not exactly that of common day. When Dr. Roland recounted to Miss Bethune the story of Mr. Mannering, that lady shut her lips tight in the partial shadow of the screen, to restrain the almost irrepressible murmurs of a revelation equally out of the common which belonged to herself. That is, she was tempted to utter aloud what she said in her soul, "Oh, but that is like me!" "Oh, but I would never have done that!"—comparing the secret in her own life, which nobody in this place suspected, with the secret in her neighbour's, which, at least to some few persons, was known.

Poor Mr. Mannering! there was a strange kind of superiority and secret satisfaction in pitying his fate, in learning all the particulars of it, in

assuring herself that Dora was quite ignorant, and nobody in the house had the least suspicion, while at the same time secure in the consciousness that she herself was wrapt in impenetrable darkness, and that not even this gossip of a doctor could divine her. There is an elation in knowing that you too have a story, that your own experiences are still more profound than those of the others whom you are called upon to pity and wonder over, that did they but know!—which, perhaps, is not like the more ordinary elation of conscious superiority, but yet has its sweetness. There was a certain dignity swelling in Miss Bethune's figure as she rose to shake hands with the doctor, as if she had wrapped a tragic mantle round her, as if she dismissed him like a queen on the edge of ground too sacred to be trodden by any vulgar feet. He was conscious of it vaguely, though not of what it was. He gave her a very keen glance in the shadow of that screen : a keener observer

than Dr. Roland was not easily to be met with,—but then his observations were generally turned in one particular way, and the phenomena which he glimpsed on this occasion did not come within the special field of his inquiries. He perceived them, but he could not classify them, in the scientific narrowness of his gaze.

Miss Bethune waited until the well-known sound of the closing of Dr. Roland's door downstairs met her ear; and then she rang violently, eagerly for her maid. What an evening this was, among all the quiet evenings on which nothing happened,—an evening full of incidents, of mysteries, and disclosures! The sound of the bell was such that the person summoned came hurrying from her room, well aware that there must be something to be told, and already breathless with interest. She found her mistress walking up and down the room, the screen discarded, the fan thrown down, the very shade on the lamp

pushed up, so that it had the tipsy air of a hat placed on one side of the head. "Oh, Gilchrist!" Miss Bethune cried.

Dr. Roland went, as he always went, briskly but deliberately downstairs. If he had ever run up and down at any period of his life, taking two steps at a time, as young men do, he did it no longer. He was a little short-sighted, and wore a "pince-nez," and was never sure that between his natural eyes, with which he looked straight down at his feet, and his artificial ones, which had a wider circle, he might not miss a step, which accounted for the careful, yet rapid character of his movements. The door which Miss Bethune waited to hear him close was exactly below her own, and the room filled in Dr. Roland's life the conjoint positions of waiting-room, dining-room, and library. His consulting-room was formed of the other half looking to the back, and shut off from this by folding-doors and closely-drawn

curtains. All the piles of *Illustrated News*, *Graphic*, and other picture papers, along with various well-thumbed pictorial volumes, the natural embellishments of the waiting-room, were carefully cleared away; and the room, with Dr. Roland's chair drawn near a cheery blazing fire, his reading-lamp, his book, and his evening paper on his table, looked comfortable enough. It was quite an ordinary room in Bloomsbury, and he was quite an ordinary man. Nothing remarkable (the reader will be glad to hear) had ever happened to him. He had gone through the usual studies, he had knocked about the world for a number of years, he had seen life and many incidents in other people's stories both at home and abroad. But nothing particular had ever happened to himself. He had lived, but if he had loved, nobody knew anything about that. He had settled in Bloomsbury some four or five years before, and he had grown into a steady, not too

overwhelming practice. His specialty was the treatment of dyspepsia, and other evils of a sedentary life; and his patients were chiefly men, the men of offices and museums, among whom he had a great reputation. This was his official character, not much of a family adviser, but strong to rout the liver fiend and the demons of indigestion wherever encountered. But in his private capacity Dr. Roland's character was very remarkable, and his scientific enthusiasm great.

He was a sort of medical detective, working all for love, and nothing for reward, without fee, and in many cases without even the high pleasure of carrying out his views. He had the eye of a hawk for anything wrong in the complexion or aspect of those who fell under his observation. The very postman at the door, whom Dr. Roland had met two or three times as he went out for his constitutional in the morning, had been divined and cut open, as it were, by his lancet of a glance,



and saved from a bad illness by the peremptory directions given to him, which the man had the sense (and the prudence, for it was near Christmas) to obey. In that case the gratuity passed from doctor to patient, not from patient to doctor, but was not perhaps less satisfactory on that account. Then Dr. Roland would seize Jenny or Molly by the shoulders when they timidly brought a message or a letter into his room, look into the blue of their eyes for a moment, and order a dose on the spot ; a practice which made these innocent victims tremble even to pass his door.

“ Oh, granny, I can't, I can't take it up to the doctor,” they would say, even when it was a telegram that had come : little selfish things, not thinking what poor sick person might be sending for the doctor ; nor how good it was to be able to get a dose for nothing every time you wanted it.

But most of the people whom he met

were less easily manageable than the postman and the landlady's little granddaughters. Dr. Roland regarded every one he saw from this same medical point of view; and had made up his mind about Miss Bethune, and also about Mr. Mannering, before he had been a week in the house. Unfortunately, he could do nothing to impress his opinion upon them; but he kept his eyes very wide open, and took notes, attending the moment when perhaps his opportunity might occur. As for Dora, he had nothing but contempt for her from the first moment he had seen her. Hers was a case of inveterate good health, and wholly without interest. That girl, he declared to himself scornfully, would be well anywhere. Bloomsbury had no effect upon her. She was neither anæmic or dyspeptic, though the little things downstairs were both. But her father was a different matter. Half a dozen playful demons were skirmishing around that careful,

temperate, well-living man; and Dr. Roland took the greatest interest in their advances and withdrawals, expecting the day when one or other would seize the patient and lay him low. Miss Bethune, too, had her little band of assailants, who were equally interesting to Dr. Roland, but not equally clear, since he was as yet quite in the dark as to the moral side of the question in her case.

He knew what would happen to these two, and calculated their chances with great precision, taking into account all the circumstances that might defer or accelerate the catastrophe. These observations interested him like a play. It was a kind of second sight that he possessed, but reaching much further than the vision of any Highland seer, who sees the winding-sheet only when it is very near, mounting in a day or two from the knees to the waist, and hence to the head. But Dr. Roland saw its shadow long before

it could have been visible to any person gifted with the second sight. Sometimes he was wrong—he had acknowledged as much to himself in one or two instances; but it was very seldom that this occurred. Those who take a pessimistic view either of the body or soul are bound to be right in many, if not in most cases, we are obliged to allow.

But it was not with the design of hunting patients that Dr. Roland made these investigations; his interest in the persons he saw around him was purely scientific. It diverted him greatly, if such a word may be used, to see how they met their particular dangers, whether they instinctively avoided or rushed to encounter them, both which methods they constantly employed in their unconsciousness. He liked to note the accidents (so called) that came in to stave off or to hurry on the approaching trouble. The persons to whom these occurred had often no knowledge of them;

but Dr. Roland noted everything and forgot nothing. He had a wonderful memory as well as such excessively clear sight ; and he carried on, as circumstances permitted, a sort of oversight of the case, even if it might be in somebody else's hands. Sometimes his interest in these outlying patients who were not his, interfered with the concentration of his attention on those who were—who were chiefly, as has been said, dyspeptics and the like, affording no exciting variety of symptoms to his keen intellectual and professional curiosity. And these peculiarities made him a very serviceable neighbour. He never objected to be called in in haste, because he was the nearest doctor, or to give a flying piece of advice to any one who might be attacked by sudden pain or uneasiness ; indeed, he might be said to like these unintentional interferences with other people's work, which afforded him increased means of observation, and the privilege of launch-

ing a new prescription at a patient's head by way of experiment, or confidential counsel at the professional brother whom he was thus accidentally called upon to aid.

On the particular evening which he occupied by telling Miss Bethune the story of the Mannerings,—not without an object in so doing, for he had a strong desire to put that lady herself under his microscope and find out how certain things affected her,—he had scarcely got himself comfortably established by his own fireside, put on a piece of wood to make a blaze, felt for his cigar-case upon the mantelpiece, and taken up his paper, when a knock at his door roused him in the midst of his preparations for comfort. The doctor lifted his head quickly, and cocked one fine ear like a dog, and with something of the thrill of listening with which a dog responds to any sound. That he let the knock be repeated was by no means to say that he had not heard

the first time. A knock at his door was something like a first statement of symptoms to the doctor. He liked to understand and make certain what it meant.

“Come in,” he said quickly, after the second knock, which had a little hurry and temerity in it after the tremulous sound of the first.

The door opened ; and there appeared at it, flushed with fright and alarm, yet pallid underneath the flush, the young and comely countenance of Mrs. Hesketh, Dora’s friend on the attic floor.

“Oh !” Dr. Roland said, taking in this unexpected appearance, and all her circumstances, physical and mental, at a glance. He had met her also more than once at the door or on the stairs. He asked kindly what was the little fool frightened about, as he rose up quickly and with unconscious use and wont placed a chair in the best light, where he should be able to read the

simple little alphabet of her constitution and thoughts.

“Oh, doctor, sir! I hope you don’t mind me coming to disturb you, though I know as it’s late and past hours.”

“A doctor has no hours. Come in,” he said.

Then there was a pause. The agitated young face disappeared, leaving Dr. Roland only a side view of her shoulder and figure in profile, and a whispering ensued. “I cannot—I cannot! I ain’t fit,” in a hoarse tone, and then the young woman’s eager pleading. “Oh, Alfred dear, for my sake!”

“Come in, whoever it is,” said Dr. Roland, with authority. “A doctor has no hours, but other people in the house have, and you mustn’t stay outside.”

Then there was a little dragging on the part of the wife, a little resistance on the part of the husband; and finally Mrs. Hesketh appeared,



more flushed than ever, grasping the sleeve of a rather unwholesome-looking young man, very pink all over and moist, with furtive eyes, and hair standing on end. He had a fluttered clandestine look, as if afraid to be seen, as he came into the full light of the lamp, and looked suspiciously around him, as if to find out whether anything dangerous was there.

"It is my 'usband, sir," said Mrs. Hesketh. "It's Alfred. He's been off his food and off his sleep for I don't know how long, and I'm not happy about him. I thought perhaps you might give him a something that would put him all straight."

"Off his food and off his sleep? Perhaps he hasn't been off his drink also?" said the doctor, giving a touch to the shade of the lamp.

"I knew," said the young man, in the same partially hoarse voice, "as that is what would be said."

“And a gentleman like you ought to know better,” said the indignant wife. “Drink is what he never touches, if it isn’t a ’alf pint to his supper, and that only to please me.”

“Then it’s something else, and not drink,” said the doctor. “Sit down, and let me have a look at you.” He took into his cool grasp a somewhat tremulous damp hand, which had been hanging down by the patient’s side, limp yet agitated, like a thing he had no use for. “Tell me something about him,” said Dr. Roland. “In a shop? Baxter’s?—yes, I know the place. What you call shopman,—no, assistant,—young gentleman at the counter?”

“Oh, no,” said Mrs. Hesketh, with pride; “book-keeper, sir—sits up in his desk in the middle of the costume department, and ——”

“Ah, I see,” said the doctor quickly. He gave the limp wrist, in which the pulse had suddenly given a great jump, a grip with his cool

hand. "Control yourself," he said quietly. "Nerves all in a whirl, system breaking down—can you take a holiday?"

"Oh, yes," said the young man in a sort of bravado, "of course I can take a holiday! and an express ticket for the workhouse after it. How are we to live if I go taking holidays? We can't afford no holidays," he said in his gruff voice.

"There are worse places than the workhouse," said the doctor, with meaning. "Take this, and to-morrow I'll give you a note to send to your master. The first thing you want is a good night's sleep."

"Oh, that is the truth, however you know it," cried Mrs. Hesketh. "He hasn't had a night's sleep, nor me neither, not for a month back."

"I'll see that he has one to-night," said Dr. Roland, drawing back the curtain of his surgery and opening the folding-doors.

"I won't take no opiates, doctor," said the

young man, with dumb defiance in his sleepy eyes.

"You won't take any opiates? And why, if I may ask?" the doctor said, selecting a bottle from the shelf.

"Not a drop of your nasty sleepy stuff, that makes fellows dream and talk nonsense in their sleep—oh, not for me!"

"You are afraid, then, of talking nonsense in your sleep? We must get rid of the nonsense, not of the sleep," said the doctor. "I don't say that this is an opiate, but you have got to swallow it, my fine fellow, whether or not."

"No," said the young man, setting his lips firmly together.

"Drink!" cried Dr. Roland, fully roused. "Come, I'll have no childish, wry faces. Why, you're a man—with a wife—and not a naughty boy!"

“It’s not my doing coming here. She brought me, and I’ll see her far enough ——”

“Hold your tongue, you young ass, and take your physic! She’s a capital woman, and has done exactly as she ought to have done. No nonsense, I tell you! Sleep to-night, and then to-morrow you’ll go and set yourself right with the shop.”

“Sir!” cried the young man, with a gasp. His pulse gave a jump under the strong cool grip in which Dr. Roland had again taken it, and he fixed a frightened imploring gaze upon the doctor’s face.

“Oh, doctor!” cried the poor wife, “there’s nothing to set right with the shop. They think all the world of Alfred there.”

“They’ll think all the more of him,” said Dr. Roland, “after he has had a good night’s sleep. There, take him off to bed; and at ten o’clock to-morrow morning I expect to see him here.”

“ Oh, doctor, is it anything bad ? Oh, sir, can’t you make him all right ? ” she cried, standing with clasped hands, listening to the hurried yet wavering step with which her husband went upstairs.

“ I’ll tell you to-morrow morning,” Dr. Roland said.

When the door was closed he went and sat down again by his fire ; but the calm of his mind, the pleasure of his cigar, the excitement of his newspaper, had gone. Truth to tell, the excitement of this new question pleased him more than all these things together. “ Has he done it, or is he only going to do it ? ” he asked himself. Could the thing be set right, or could it never be set right ? He sat there for perhaps an hour, working out the question in both directions, considering the case in every light. It was a long time since he had met with anything so interesting. He only came to himself when he became conscious that the fire was burning very low, and the

chill of the night creeping into the air. Then Dr. Roland rose again, compounded a drink for himself of a different quality from that which he had given to his patient, and selected out of his bookcase a yellow novel. But after a while he pitched the book from him, and pushed away the glass, and resumed his meditations. What was grog, and what was Gaboriau, in comparison with a problem like this?

## CHAPTER VI.

THE house in Bloomsbury was, however, much more deeply troubled and excited than it would have been by anything affecting Alfred Hesketh, when it was known next morning that Mr. Mannering had been taken ill in the night, and was now unable to leave his bed. The doctor had been sent for early—alas! it was not Dr. Roland—and the whole household was disturbed. Such a thing had not been known for nearly a dozen years past, as that Mr. Mannering should not walk downstairs exactly at a quarter before ten, and close the door behind him, forming a sort of fourth chime to the three-quarters as they sounded from the church clock. The house was put out for the day by this failure in the regularity of its life and movement; all the more that it was very soon



known that this prop of the establishment was very ill, that "the fever" ran very high, and that even his life was in danger. Nobody made much remark in these circumstances upon the disappearance of the humble little people on the upper floor, who, after much coming and going between their habitation and that of Dr. Roland downstairs, made a hurried departure, providentially, Mrs. Simcox said—thus leaving a little available room for the nurse who by this time had taken possession of the Mannering establishment, reducing Dora to the position which she had never occupied, of a child, and taking the management of everything. Two of these persons, indeed, had been ordered in by the doctor—a nurse for the day, and a nurse for the night, who filled the house with that air of redundant health and cheerfulness which seem to belong to nurses, one or other of them being always met on the stairs going out for her constitutional, going down for

her meals, taking care of herself in some methodical way or other, according to prescription, that she might be fit for her work. And no doubt they were very fit for their work, and amply responded to the confidence placed in them : which was only not shared by Dora, banished by them out of her father's room—and Miss Bethune, a woman full of prejudices, and Gilchrist, whose soft heart could not resist the cheerful looks of the two fresh young women, though their light-heartedness shocked her a little, and the wrongs of Dora filled her heart with sympathy.

Alas ! Dora was not yet sixteen—there was no possibility, however carefully you counted the months, and showed her birthday to be approaching, to get over that fact. And what were her love and anxious desire to be of service, and devotion to her father, in comparison with these few years and the superior training of the women, who knew almost as much as the doctor himself?

“Not saying much, that!” Dr. Roland grumbled under his breath, as he joined the anxious circle of malcontents in Miss Bethune’s apartment, where Dora came, trying proudly to restrain her tears, and telling how she had been shut out of Mr. Mannering’s room—“my own father’s room!” the girl cried in her indignation, two big drops, like raindrops, falling, in spite of her, upon her dress.

“It’s better for you, my bonnie dear,—oh, it’s better for you,” Gilchrist whispered, standing behind her, and drying her own flowing eyes with her apron.

“Dora, my darling,” said Miss Bethune, moved to a warmth of spirit quite unusual to her, “it is quite true what Gilchrist says. I am not fond of these women myself. They shall never nurse me. If I cannot have a hand that cares for me to smooth my pillow, it shall be left unsmoothed, and none of these good-looking hussies shall smile

over me when I'm dying—no, no! But it is different; you're far too young to have that on your head. I would not permit it. Gilchrist and me would have taken it and done every justice to your poor papa, I make no doubt, and been all the better for the work, two idle women as we are—but not you. You should have come and gone, and sat by his bedside and cheered him with the sight of you; but to nurse him was beyond your power. Ask the doctor, and he will tell you that as well as me."

"I have always taken care of my father before," said Dora. "When he has had his colds, and when he had rheumatism, and when——that time, Dr. Roland, you know."

"That was the time," said the doctor, "when you ran down to me in the middle of the night and burst into my room, like a wise little girl. We had him in our own hands then, and we knew what to do with him, Dora. But here's Vereker,

he's a great swell, and neither you nor I can interfere."

It comforted Dora a little to have Dr. Roland placed with herself among the outsiders who could not interfere, especially when Miss Bethune added: "That is just the grievance. We would all like to have a finger in the pie. Why should a man be taken out of the care of his natural friends and given into the charge of these women, that never saw him in their lives before, nor care whether he lives or dies?"

"Oh, they care—for their own reputation. There is nothing to be said against the women, they'll do their duty," said the doctor. "But there's Vereker, that has never studied his constitution—that sees just the present symptoms, and no more. Take the child out for a walk, Miss Bethune, and let's have her fresh and fair for him, at least, if"—the doctor pulled himself up hastily, and coughed to swallow the last alarm-

ing syllable,—“fresh and fair,” he added hastily, “*when* he gets better, which is a period with which no nurses can interfere.”

A colloquy, which was silent yet full of eager interest and feeling, sprang up between two pairs of eyes at the moment that *if*—most alarming of conjectures—was uttered. Miss Bethune questioned; the doctor replied. Then he said in an undertone: “A constitution never very strong,—exhausting work, exhausting emotions, unnatural peace in the latter life”.

Dora was being led away by Gilchrist to get her hat for the proposed walk; and Dr. Roland ended in his ordinary voice:

“Do you call that unnatural peace, with all the right circumstances of his life round him, and—and full possession of his bonnie girl, that has never been parted from him? I don’t call that unnatural.”

“You would if you were aware of the other

side of it lopped off—one half of him, as it were paralysed.”

“Doctor,” said Miss Bethune, with a curious smile, “I ought to take that as a compliment to my sex, as the fools say—if I cared a button for my sex or any such nonsense! But there is yourself, now, gets on very well, so far as I can see, with that side, as you call it, just as much lopped off.”

“How do you know?” said the doctor. “I may be letting concealment, like a worm in the bud, feed on my damask cheek. But I allow,” he said, with a laugh, “I do get on very well: and so, if you will permit me to say it, do you, Miss Bethune. But then, you see, we have never known anything else.”

Something leaped up in Miss Bethune’s eye—a strange light, which the doctor could not interpret, though it did not escape his observation. “To be sure,” she said, nodding her head, “we

have never known anything else. And that changes the case altogether."

"That changes the case. I say nothing against a celibate life. I have always preferred it—it suits me better. I never cared," he added, again with a laugh, "to have too much baggage to move about."

"Do not be uncivil, doctor, after being more civil than was necessary."

"But it's altogether a different case with poor Mannering. It is not even as if his wife had betrayed him—in the ordinary way. The poor thing meant no harm."

"Oh, do not speak to me!" cried Miss Bethune, throwing up her hands.

"I know; it is well known you ladies are always more severe—but, anyhow, that side was wrenched away in a moment, and then there followed long years of unnatural calm."

"I do not agree with you, doctor," she said,



shaking her head. "The wrench was defeenitive." Miss Bethune's nationality betrayed itself in a great breadth of vowels, as well as in here and there a word or two. "It was a cut like death: and you do not call calm unnatural that comes after death, after long years?"

"It's different—it's different," the doctor said.

"Ay, so it is," she said, answering as it were her own question.

And there was a pause. When two persons of middle age discuss such questions, there is a world lying behind each full of experiences, which they recognise instinctively, however completely unaware they may be of each other's case.

"But here is Dora ready for her walk, and me doing nothing but haver," cried Miss Bethune, disappearing into the next room.

They might have been mother and daughter going out together in the gentle tranquillity of use and wont,—so common a thing!—and yet if the

two had been mother and daughter, what a revolution in how many lives would have been made!—how different would the world have been for an entire circle of human souls! They were, in fact, nothing to each other—brought together, as we say, by chance, and as likely to be whirled apart again by those giddy combinations and dissolutions which the head goes round only to think of. For the present they walked closely together side by side, and talked of one subject which engrossed all their thoughts.

“What does the doctor think? Oh, tell me, please, what the doctor thinks!”

“How can he think anything, Dora, my dear? He has never seen your father since he was taken ill.”

“Oh, Miss Bethune, but he knew him so well before. And I don’t ask you what he knows. He must think something. He must have an opinion. He always has an opinion, whatever case it may be.”

“He thinks, my dear, that the fever must run its course. Now another week’s begun we must just wait for the next critical moment. That is all, Dora, my darling, that is all that any man can say.”

“Oh, that it would only come!” cried Dora passionately. “There is nothing so dreadful as waiting—nothing! However bad a thing is, if you only know it, not hanging always in suspense.”

“Suspense means hope; it means possibility, and life, and all that makes life sweet. Be patient, be patient, my bonnie dear.”

Dora looked up into her friend’s face. “Were you ever as miserable as I am?” she said. Miss Bethune was thought grim by her acquaintances, and there was a hardness in her, as those who knew her best were well aware; but at this question something ineffable came into her face. Her eyes filled with tears, her lips quivered with a smile. “My little child!” she said.

Dora did not ask any more. Her soul was silenced in spite of herself: and just then there arose a new interest, which is always so good a thing for everybody, especially at sixteen. "There," she cried, in spite of herself, though she had thought she was incapable of any other thought, "is poor Mrs. Hesketh hurrying along on the other side of the street."

They had got into a side street, along one end of which was a little row of trees.

"Oh, run and speak to her, Dora."

Mrs. Hesketh seemed to feel that she was pursued. She quickened her step almost into a run, but she was breathless and agitated and laden with a bundle, and in no way capable of outstripping Dora. She paused with a gasp, when the girl laid a hand on her arm.

"Didn't you hear me call you? You surely could never, never mean to run away from me?"

“Miss Dora, you were always so kind, but I didn’t know who it might be.”

“Oh, Mrs. Hesketh, you can’t know how ill my father is, or you would have wanted to ask for him. He has been ill a month, and I am not allowed to nurse him. I am only allowed to go in and peep at him twice a day. I am not allowed to speak to him, or to do anything for him, or to know ——”

Dora paused, choked by the quick-coming tears.

“I am so sorry, miss. I thought as you were happy at least: but there’s nothing, nothing but trouble in this world,” cried Mrs. Hesketh, breaking into a fitful kind of crying. Her face was flushed and heated, the bundle impeding all her movements. She looked round in alarm at every step, and when she saw Miss Bethune’s tall figure approaching, uttered a faint cry. “Oh, Miss Dora, I can’t stay, and I can’t do you any

good even if I could; I'm wanted so bad at home."

"Where are you going with that big bundle? You are not fit to be carrying it about the streets," said Miss Bethune, suddenly standing like a lion in the way.

The poor little woman leant against a tree, supporting her bundle. "Oh, please," she said, imploring; and then, with some attempt at self-defence, "I am going nowhere but about my own business. I have got nothing but what belongs to me. Let me go."

"You must not go any further than this spot," said Miss Bethune. "Dora, go to the end of the road and get a cab. Whatever you would have got for that where you were going, I will give it you, and you can keep your poor bits of things. What has happened to you? Quick, tell me, while the child's away."

The poor young woman let her bundle fall

at her feet. "My husband's ill, and he's lost his situation," she said, with piteous brevity, and sobbed, leaning against the tree.

"And therefore you thought that was a fine time to run away and hide yourself among strangers, out of the reach of them that knew you? There was the doctor, and there was me. Did you think we would let harm happen to you? You poor feckless little thing!"

"The doctor! It was the doctor that lost Alfred his place," cried the young woman angrily, drying her eyes. "Let me go—oh, let me go! I don't want no charity," she said.

"And what would you have got for all that?"

"Perhaps ten shillings—perhaps only six. Oh, lady, you don't know us except just to see us on the stairs. I'm in great trouble, and he's heartbroken, and waiting for me at 'ome. Leave me alone and let me go."

“If you had put them away for ten shillings they would have been of no further use to you. Now, here’s ten shillings, and you’ll take these things back; but you’ll mind that they’re mine, though I give you the use of them, and you’ll promise to come to me, or to send for me, and to take no other way. What is the matter with your husband? Let him come to the doctor, and you to me.”

“Oh, never, never, to that doctor!” Mrs. Hesketh cried.

“The doctor’s a good man, and everybody’s friend, but he may have a rough tongue, I would not say. But come you to me. We’ll get him another place, and all will go well. You silly little thing, the first time trouble comes in your way, to fall into despair! Oh, this is you, Dora, with the cab. Put in the bundle. And now, here’s the money, and if you do not come to me, mind you will have broken your word.”



“Oh, ma’am! Oh, Miss Dora!” was all the poor little woman could say.

“Now, Dora,” said Miss Bethune cheerfully, “there’s something for you to do—Gilchrist and you. You’ll give an account to me of that poor thing, and if you let her slip through your fingers I’ll never forgive you. There’s something wrong. Perhaps he drinks, or perhaps he does something worse—if there’s anything worse: but whatever it is, it is your responsibility. I’m an idle, idle person; I’m good for nothing. But you’re young, and Gilchrist’s a tower of strength, and you’ll just give an account of that poor bit creature, soul and body, to me.”

## CHAPTER VII.

MR. MANNERING'S illness ran on and on. Week after week the anxious watchers waited for the crisis which did not come. It was evident now that the patient, who had no violence in his illness any more than in his life, was yet not to be spared a day of its furthest length. But it was allowed that he had no bad symptoms, and that the whole matter turned on the question whether his strength could be sustained. Dr. Roland, not allowed to do anything else for his friend, regulated furtively the quality and quantity of the milk, enough to sustain a large nursery, which was sent upstairs. He tested it in every scientific way, and went himself from dairy to dairy to get what was best; and Mrs. Simcox complained bitterly that he was constantly making inroads

into "my kitchen" to interfere in the manufacture of the beef tea. He even did, which was against every rule of medical etiquette, stop the great Dr. Vereker on the stairs and almost insist upon a medical consultation, and to give his own opinion about the patient to this great authority, who looked him over from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot with undisguised yet bewildered contempt. Who was this man who discoursed to the great physician about the tendencies and the idiosyncrasies of the sick man, whom it was a matter of something like condescension on Dr. Vereker's part to attend at all, and whom this little person evidently believed himself to understand better?

"If Mr. Mannering's friends wish me to meet you in consultation, I can have, of course, no objection to satisfy them, or even to leave the further conduct of the case in your hands," he said stiffly.

"Nothing of the kind—nothing of the kind!"

cried poor Dr. Roland. "It's only that I've watched the man for years. You perhaps don't know ——"

"I think," said Dr. Vereker, "you will allow that after nearly six weeks' attendance I ought, unless I am an ignoramus, to know all there is to know."

"I don't deny it for a moment. There is no practitioner in London certainly who would doubt Dr. Vereker's knowledge. I mean his past—what he has had to bear—the things that have led up ——"

"Moral causes?" said the great physician blandly, raising his eyebrows. "My dear sir, depend upon it, a bad drain is more to be reckoned with than all the tragedies of the world."

"I shall not depend on anything of the kind!" cried Dr. Roland, almost dancing with impatience.

"Then you will permit me to say good-morning, for my time is precious," answered his distin-

guished brother—"unless," he added sarcastically, pausing to look round upon the poor doctor's sitting-room, then arrayed in its morning guise as waiting-room, with all the old *Graphics*, and picture books laid out upon the table—"Mr. Mannering's friends are dissatisfied and wish to put the case in your hands?"

"Do you know who Mr. Mannering's friends are?" cried Dr. Roland. "Little Dora, his only child! I know no others. Just about as little influential as are those moral causes you scorn, but I don't."

"Indeed!" said Dr. Vereker, with more consideration of this last statement. Little Dora was not much of a person to look to for the rapidly accumulating fees of a celebrated doctor during a long illness. But though he was a prudent man, he was not mercenary; perhaps he would have hesitated about taking up the case had he known at first, but he was not the man to retire now out

of any fear of being paid. "Mr. Mannering is a person of distinction," he said, in a self-reassuring tone; "he has been my patient at long intervals for many years. I don't think we require to go into the question further at this moment." He withdrew with great dignity to the carriage that awaited him, crossing one or two of Dr. Roland's patients, whose appearance somewhat changed his idea of the little practitioner who had thus ventured to assail him; while, on the other hand, Roland for his part was mollified by the other's magnanimous reception of a statement which seemed to make his fees uncertain. Dr. Vereker was not in the least a mercenary man, he would never have overwhelmed an orphan girl with a great bill: at the same time, it did float across his mind that if the crisis were once over which professional spirit and honour compelled him to conduct to a good end if possible, a little carelessness about his visits after could have no bad result,

considering the constant vicinity of that very keen-eyed practitioner downstairs.

A great doctor and two nurses, unlimited supplies of fresh milk, strong soup, and every appliance that could be thought of to alleviate and console the patient, by these professional persons of the highest class, accustomed to spare no expense, are, however, things that do not agree with limited means ; and Dora, the only authority on the subject, knew nothing about her father's money, or how to get command of it. Mrs. Simcox's bills were very large in the present position of affairs, the rooms that had been occupied by the Heskeths being now appropriated to the nurses, for whom the landlady furnished a table more plentiful than that to which Mr. Manering and his daughter had been accustomed. And when the crisis at last arrived, in the middle of a tardy and backward June, the affairs of the little household, even had there been any com-

petent person to understand them, were in a very unsatisfactory state indeed—a state over which Dr. Roland and Miss Bethune consulted in the evenings with many troubled looks, and shakings of the head. She had taken all the necessary outgoings in hand, for the moment as she said; and Miss Bethune was known to be well off. But the prospect was rather serious, and neither of them knew how to interfere in the sick man's money matters, or to claim what might be owing to him, though, indeed, there was probably nothing owing to him until quarter day: and there were a number of letters lying unopened which, to experienced eyes, looked painfully like bills, as if quarter day would not have enough to do to provide for its own things without responding to this unexpected strain. Dora knew nothing about these matters. She recognised the letters with the frankest acquaintance. They were from old book shops, from scientific work-



men who mounted and prepared specimens, from dealers in microscopes and other delicate instruments. "Father says these are our dressmakers, and carriages, and parties," said Dora, half, or indeed wholly, proud of such a distinction above her fellows.

Miss Bethune shook her head and said, "Such extravagance!" in Dr. Roland's ear. He was more tolerant. "They are all the pleasures the poor man has," he said. But they did not make the problem more easy as to how the present expenses were to be met when the quarter's pay came in, even if it could be made available by Dora's only friends, who were "no relations," and had no right to act for her. Miss Bethune went through a great many abstruse calculations in the mornings which she spent alone. She was well off,—but that is a phrase which means little or much, according to circumstances; and she had a great many pensioners, and already carried a little

world on her shoulders, to which she had lately added the unfortunate little Mrs. Hesketh, and the husband, who found it so difficult to get another place. Many cares of a similar kind were on this lady's head. She never gave a single subscription to any of the societies: collectors for charities called on her in vain; but to see the little jottings of her expenses would have been a thing not without edification for those who could understand the cipher, or, rather, the combination of undecipherable initials, in which they were set down. She did not put M. for Mannering in her accounts; but there were a great many items under the initial W., which no one but herself could ever have identified, which made it quite sure that no stranger going over these accounts could make out who Miss Bethune's friends were. She shook her head over that W. If Dora were left alone, what relics would there be for her out of the future quarter's pay, so dreadfully forestalled, even

if the pay did not come to a sudden stop at once? And, on the other hand, if the poor man got better, and had to face a long convalescence with that distracting prospect before him, no neighbour any longer daring to pay those expenses which would be quite as necessary for him in his weak state as they were now? Miss Bethune could do nothing but shake her head, and feel her heart contract with that pang of painful pity in which there is no comfort at all. And in the meantime everything went on as if poor Mannering were a millionaire, everything was ordered for him with a free hand which a prince could have had; and Mrs. Simcox excelled herself in making the nurses, poor things, comfortable. What could any one do to limit this full flowing tide of liberality? Of course, he must have everything that could possibly be wanted for him; if he did not use it, at least it must be there in case he might use it. What could people who were “no rela-

tions" do? What could Dora do, who was only a child? And indeed, for the matter of that, what could any one, even in the fullest authority, have done to hinder the sick man from having anything which by the remotest possibility might be of use to him? Thus affairs went on with a dreadful velocity, and accumulation of wrath against the day of wrath.

That was a dreadful day, the end of the sixth week, the moment when the crisis must come. It was in the June evening, still daylight, but getting late, when the doctor arrived. Mr. Manering had been very ill all day, sleeping, or in a state of stupor nearly all the time, moving his head uneasily on his pillow, but never rousing to any consciousness of what was going on about him. The nurses, always cheerful, did not, however, conceal their apprehensions. He had taken his beef tea, he had taken the milk which they poured down his throat: but his strength was

gone, and he lay with no longer any power to struggle, like a forsaken boat on the sea margin, to be drifted off or on the beach according to the pleasure of wind and tide.

Miss Bethune sat in her room holding Dora's hand, who, however, did not realise that this was more important than any of the other days on which they had hoped that "the turn" might come, and a little impatient of the seriousness of the elder woman, who kept on saying tender words to her, caressing her hand,—so unnecessarily emotional, Dora thought, seeing that at all events it was not *her* father who was ill, and she had no reason to be so unhappy about it. This state of excitement was brought to a climax by the sound of the doctor's steps going upstairs, followed close by the lighter step of Dr. Roland, whom no etiquette could now restrain, who followed into the very room, and if he did not give an opinion in words, gave it with his eyes, and saw, even more quickly

than the great Dr. Vereker, everything that was to be seen. It was he who came down a few minutes later, while they were both listening for the more solemn movements of the greater authority, descending with a rush like that of a bird, scarcely touching the steps, and standing in the last sunset light which came from the long staircase window behind, like something glorified and half angelic, as if his house coat, glazed at the shoulders and elbows, had been some sort of shining mail.

Tears were in Dr. Roland's eyes; he waved his hand over his head and broke forth into a broken hurrah. Miss Bethune sprang up to meet him, holding out her hands. And in the sight of stern youth utterly astonished by this exhibition, these two elderly people as good as rushed into each other's arms.

Dora was so astounded, so disapproving, so little aware that this was her last chance for her

father's life, that she almost forgot her father in the consternation, shame, and horror with which she looked on. What did they mean? It could not have anything to do with her father, of whom they were "no relations". How dared they to bring in their own silly affairs when she was in such trouble? And then Miss Bethune caught herself, Dora, in her arms.

"What is the matter?" cried the girl. "Oh, let me alone! I can think of nothing but father and Dr. Vereker, who is upstairs."

"It is all right—it is all right," said Dr. Roland. "Vereker will take half an hour more to make up his mind. But I can tell you at once; the fever's gone, and, please God, he'll pull through."

"Is it only you that says so, Dr. Roland?" cried Dora, hard as the nether millstone, and careless, indeed unconscious, what wound she might give.

“You little ungrateful thing!” cried Miss Bethune; but a shadow came over her eyes also. And the poor practitioner from the ground floor felt that “only you” knock him down like a stone. He gave a laugh, and made no further reply, but walked over to the window, where he stood between the curtains, looking out upon the summer evening, the children playing on the pavement, all the noises and humours of the street. No, he had not made a name for himself, he had not secured the position of a man who has life and death in his nod. It was hard upon Dr. Roland, who felt that he knew far more about Mr. Mannering than half a hundred great physicians rolled into one, coming in with his solemn step at the open door.

“Yes, I think he will do,” said Dr. Vereker. “Miss Mannering, I cannot sufficiently recommend you to leave everything in the hands of these two admirable women. It will be anxious



work for some time yet ; his strength is reduced to the very lowest ebb, but yet, I hope, all will come right. The same strenuous skilful nursing and constant judicious nourishment and rest. This young lady is very young to have such an anxiety. Is there really no one—no relation, no uncle—nor anything of that kind ? ”

“ We have no relations,” said Dora, growing very red. There seemed a sort of guilt in the avowal, she could not tell why.

“ But fast friends,” said Miss Bethune.

“ Ah, friends ! Friends are very good to comfort and talk to a poor little girl, but they are not responsible. They cannot be applied to for fees ; whereas an uncle, though perhaps not so good for the child —— ” Dr. Vereker turned to Dr. Roland at the window. “ I may be prevented from coming to-morrow so soon as I should wish ; indeed, the patient should be looked at again to-night if I had time. But it is a long

way to come back here. I am sure it will be a comfort to this young lady, Dr. Roland, if you, being on the spot, would kindly watch the case when I am not able to be here."

Dr. Roland cast but one glance at the doubting spectators, who had said, "Only you".

"With all my heart, and thank you for the confidence you put in me," he said.

"Oh, that," said the great doctor, with a wave of his hand, "is only your due. I have to thank you for one or two hints, and you know as well as I do what care is required now. We may congratulate ourselves that things are as they are; but his life hangs on a thread. Thank you. I may rely upon you then? Good-evening, madam; forgive me for not knowing your name. Good-night, Miss Mannering."

Dr. Roland attended the great man to the door; and returned again, taking three steps at a time. "You see," he cried breathlessly, "I am

in charge, though you don't think much of me. He's not a mercenary man, he has stayed to pull him through ; but we shan't see much more of Dr. Vereker. There's the fees saved at a stroke."

"And there's the women," said Miss Bethune eagerly, "taking real pleasure in it, and growing fatter and fairer every day."

"The women have done very well," said the doctor. "I'll have nothing said against them. It's they that have pulled him through." Dr. Roland did not mean to share his triumph with any other voluntary aid.

"Well, perhaps that is just," she said, regretfully ; "but yet here is me and Gilchrist hungering for something to do, and all the good pounds a week that might be so useful handed over to them."

Dora listened to all this, half indignant, half uncomprehending. She had a boundless scorn of the "good pounds" of which Miss Bethune in

her Scotch phraseology spoke so tenderly. And she did not clearly understand why this particular point in her father's illness should be so much more important than any other. She heard her own affairs discussed as through a haze, resenting that these other people should think they had so much to do with them, and but dimly understanding what they meant by it. Her father, indeed, did not seem to her any better at all, when she was allowed for a moment to see him as he lay asleep. But Dora, fortunately, thought nothing of the expenses, nor how the little money that came in at quarter day would melt away like snow, nor how the needs, now miraculously supplied as by the ravens, would look when the invalid awoke to a consciousness of them, and of how they were to be provided in a more natural way.

It was not very long, however, before something of that consciousness awoke in the eyes of

the patient, as he slowly came back into the atmosphere of common life from which he had been abstracted so long. He was surprised to find Dr. Roland at his pillow, which that eager student would scarcely have left by day or night if he could have helped it, and the first glimmering of anxiety about his ways and means came into his face when Roland explained hastily that Vereker came faithfully so long as there was any danger. "But now he thinks a poor little practitioner like myself, being on the spot, will do," he said, with a laugh. "Saves fees, don't you know?"

"Fees?" poor Mannering said, with a bewildered consciousness; and next morning began to ask when he could go back to the Museum. Fortunately, all ideas were dim in that floating weakness amid the sensations of a man coming back to life. Convalescence is sweet in youth; but it is not sweet when a man whose life is

already waning comes back out of the utter prostration of disease into the lesser but more conscious ills of common existence. Presently he began to look at the luxuries with which he was surrounded, and the attendants who watched over him, with alarm. "Look here, Roland, I can't afford all this. You must put a stop to all this," he said.

"We can't be economical about getting well, my dear fellow," said the doctor. "That's the last thing to save money on."

"But I haven't got it! One can't spend what one hasn't got," cried the sick man. It is needless to say that his progress was retarded, and the indispensable economies postponed, by this new invasion of those cares which are to the mind what the drainage which Dr. Vereker alone believed in is to the body.

"Never mind, father," Dora said in her ignorance; "it will all come right."

“Right? How is it to come right? Take that stuff away. Send these nurses away. I can't afford it. Do you hear me? I cannot afford it!” he began to cry night and day.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MANNERING'S convalescence was worse than his illness had been to the house in Bloomsbury. Mrs. Simcox's weekly bill fell by chance into the patient's hands, and its items filled him with horror. When a man is himself painfully supported on cups of soup and wings of chicken, the details of roast lamb for the day-nurse's dinner, and bacon and eggs for the night-nurse's breakfast, take an exaggerated magnitude. And Mrs. Simcox was very conscientious, putting down even the parsley and the mint which were necessary for these meals. This bill put back the patient's recovery for a week, and prolonged the expenses, and brought the whole house, as Mrs. Simcox declared tearfully, on her comparatively innocent head.



“For wherever’s the bill to go if not to the gentleman hisself?” cried the poor woman. “He’s sittin’ up every day, and gettin’ on famous, by what I hears. And he always did like to see ’is own bills, did Mr. Mannering: and what’s a little bit of a thing like Miss Dora to go to, to make her understand money? Lord bless you! she don’t spend a shilling in a week, nor knows nothing about it. And the nurses, as was always to have everything comfortable, seeing the ’ard work as they ’as, poor things. And if it was a bit o’ mint for sauce, or a leaf o’ parsley for garnish, I’d have put it in out o’ my own pocket and welcome, if I’d a thought a gentleman would go on about sich things.”

“You ridiculous woman, why couldn’t you have brought it to me, as you have done before? And who do you suppose cares for your parsley and your mint?” cried Miss Bethune. But nobody knew better than Miss Bethune that the

bills could not now be brought to her ; and it was with a sore heart, and that sense of the utter impossibility of affording any help, with which we look on impotent at the troubles of our neighbours, whom we dare not offend even by our sympathy, that she went downstairs in a morning of July, when London was hot and stifling, yet still, as ever, a little grace and coolness dwelt in the morning, to refresh herself with a walk under the trees in the Square, to which she had a privilege of entrance.

Even in London in the height of summer the morning is sweet. There is that sense of ease and lightness in it, which warm and tranquil weather brings, before it comes too hot to bear. There were smells in the streets in the afternoon, and the din of passing carts and carriages, of children playing, of street cries and shouts, which would sometimes become intolerable ; but in the morning there was shade and softness, and a sense

of trouble suspended for the moment or withdrawn, which often follows the sudden sharp realisation of any misfortune which comes with the first waking. The pavement was cool, and the air was (comparatively) sweet. There was a tinkle of water, though only from a water cart. Miss Bethune opened the door into this sweetness and coolness and morning glory which exists even in Bloomsbury, and found herself suddenly confronted by a stranger, whose hand had been raised to knock when the door thus suddenly opened before him. The sudden encounter gave her a little shock, which was not lessened by the appearance of the young man—a young fellow of three or four and twenty, in light summer clothes, and with a pleasant sunburnt countenance.

Not his the form, not his the eye,  
That youthful maidens wont to fly.

Miss Bethune was no youthful maiden, but this sudden apparition had a great effect upon her.

The sight made her start, and grow red and grow pale without any reason, like a young person in her teens.

"I beg your pardon," said the young man, making a step back, and taking off his hat. This was clearly an afterthought, and due to her appearance, which was not that of the mistress of a lodging-house. "I wanted to ask after a ——"

"I am not the person of the house," said Miss Bethune quickly.

"Might I ask you all the same? I would so much rather hear from some one who knows him."

Miss Bethune's eyes had been fixed upon him with the closest attention, but her interest suddenly changed and dropped at the last word. "Him?" she said involuntarily, with a flash out of her eyes, and a look almost of disappointment, almost of surprise. What had she expected? She recovered in a moment the composure

which had been disturbed by this stranger's appearance, for what reason she only knew.

"I came," he said, hesitating a little, and giving her another look, in which there was also some surprise and much curiosity, "to inquire about Mr. Mannering, who, I am told, lives here."

"Yes, he lives here."

"And has been ill?"

"And has been ill," she repeated after him.

The young man smiled, and paused again. He seemed to be amused by these repetitions. He had a very pleasant face, not intellectual, not remarkable, but full of life and good-humour. He said: "Perhaps I ought not to trouble you; but if you know him, and his child ——"

"I know him very well, and his child,—who is a child no longer, but almost grown up. He is slowly recovering out of a very long dangerous illness."

"That is what we heard. I came, not for

myself, but for a lady who takes a great interest. I think that she is a relation of—of Mr. Mannering's late wife."

"Is that woman dead, then?" Miss Bethune said. "I too take a great interest in the family. I shall be glad to tell you anything I know: but come with me into the Square, where we can talk at our ease." She led him to a favourite seat under the shadow of a tree. Though it was in Bloomsbury, and the sounds of town were in the air, that quiet green place might have been far in the country, in the midst of pastoral acres. The Squares of Bloomsbury are too respectable to produce many children. There were scarcely even any perambulators to vulgarise this retreat. She turned to him as she sat down, and said again: "So that woman is dead?"

The young stranger looked surprised. "You mean Mrs. Mannering?" he said. "I suppose so, though I know nothing of her. May I say

who I am first? My name is Gordon. I have just come from South America with Mrs. Bristow, the wife of my guardian, who died there a year ago. And it is she who has sent me to inquire."

"Gordon?" said Miss Bethune. She had closed her eyes, and her head was going round; but she signed to him with her hand to sit down, and made a great effort to recover herself. "You will be of one of the Scotch families?" she said.

"I don't know. I have never been in this country till now."

"Born abroad?" she said, suddenly opening her eyes.

"I think so—at least—but, indeed, I can tell you very little about myself. It was Mrs. Bristow ——"

"Yes, I know. I am very indiscreet, putting so many questions, but you reminded me of—of some one I once knew. Mrs. Bristow, you were saying?"

“She was very anxious to know something of Mr. Mannering and his child. I think she must be a relation of his late wife.”

“God be thanked if there is a relation that may be of use to Dora. She wants to know—what? If you were going to question the landlady, it would not be much ——”

“I was to try to do exactly what I seem to have been so fortunate as to have done—to find some friend whom I could ask about them. I am sure you must be a friend to them.”

“How can you be sure of that, you that know neither them nor me?”

He smiled, with a very attractive, ingenuous smile. “Because you have the face of a friend.”

“Have I that? There’s many, many, then, that would have been the better for knowing it that have never found it out. And you are a friend to Mrs. Bristow on the other side?”

“A friend to her?—no, I am more like her son,



yet not her son, for my own mother is living—at least, I believe so. I am her servant, and a little her ward, and—devoted to her,” he added, with a bright flush of animation and sincerity. Miss Bethune took no notice of these last words.

“Your mother is living, you believe? and don’t you know her, then? And why should you be ward or son to this other woman, and your mother alive?”

“Pardon me,” said the young man, “that is my story, and it is not worth a thought. The question is about Mrs. Bristow and the Mannerings. She is anxious about them, and she is very broken in health. And I think there is some family trouble there too, so that she can’t come in a natural straightforward way and make herself known to them. These family quarrels are dreadful things.”

“Dreadful things,” Miss Bethune said.

“They are bad enough for those with whom

they originate ; but for those who come after, worse still. To be deprived of a natural friend all your life because of some row that took place before you were born ! ”

“ You are a Daniel come to judgment,” said Miss Bethune, pale to her very lips.

“ I hope,” he said kindly, “ I am not saying anything I ought not to say ? I hope you are not ill ? ”

“ Go on,” she said, waving her hand. “ About this Mrs. Bristow, that is what we were talking of. The Mannerings could not be more in need of a friend than they are now. He has been very ill. I hear it is very doubtful if he’ll ever be himself again, or able to go back to his occupation. And she is very young, nearly grown up, but still a child. If there was a friend, a relation, to stand up for them, now would be the very time.”

“ Thank you,” he said. “ I have been very

fortunate in finding you, but I don't think Mrs. Bristow can take any open step. My idea is that she must be a sister of Mrs. Mannering, and thus involved in the dissension, whatever it was."

"It was more than a dissension, so far as I have heard," Miss Bethune said.

"That is what makes it so hard. What she wishes is to see Dora."

"Dora?"

"Indeed, I mean no disrespect. I have never known her by any other name. I have helped to pack boxes for her, and choose playthings."

Miss Bethune uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Then it was from Mrs. Bristow the boxes came?"

"Have I let out something that was a secret? I am not very good at secrets," he said with a laugh.

"She might be an aunt as you say:—an aunt would be a good thing for her, poor child:—or

she might be —— But is it Dora only she wants to see?”

“Dora only; and only Dora if it is certain that she would entertain no prejudices against a relation of her mother.”

“How could there be prejudices of such a kind?”

“That is too much to say: but I know from my own case that there are,” the young man said.

“I would like to hear your own case.”

He laughed again. “You are very kind to be so much interested in a stranger: but I must settle matters for my kind guardian. She has not been a happy woman, I don’t know why,—though he was as good a man as ever lived:—and now she is in very poor health—oh, really ill. I scarcely thought I could have got her to England alive. To see Dora is all she seems to wish for. Help me, oh, help me to get her that gratification!” he cried.

Miss Bethune smiled upon him in reply, with an involuntary movement of her hands towards him. She was pale, and a strange light was on her face.

“I will do that if I can,” she said. “I will do it if it is possible. If I help you what will you give me in return?”

The youth looked at her in mild surprise. He did not understand what she could mean. “Give you in return?” he asked, with astonishment.

“Ay, my young man, for my hire ; everybody has a price, as I daresay you have heard said—which is a great lie, and yet true enough. Mine is not just a common price, as you will believe. I’m full of fancies, a—whimsical kind of a being. You will have to pay me for my goodwill.”

He rose up from the seat under the tree, and, taking off his hat again, made her a solemn bow. “Anything that is within my power I will gladly

give to secure my good guardian what she wishes. I owe everything to her."

Miss Bethune sat looking up at him with that light on her face which made it unlike everything that had been seen before. She was scarcely recognisable, or would have been to those who already knew her. To the stranger standing somewhat stiffly before her, surprised and somewhat shocked by the strange demand, it seemed that this, as he had thought, plain middle-aged woman had suddenly become beautiful.

He had liked her face at the first. It had seemed to him a friend's face, as he had said. But now it was something more. The surprise, the involuntary start of repugnance from a woman, a lady, who boldly asked something in return for the help she promised, mingled with a strange attraction towards her, and extraordinary curiosity as to what she could mean. To pay for her goodwill! Such a thing is, perhaps, implied in

every prayer for help ; gratitude at the least, if nothing more, is the pay which all the world is supposed to give for good offices : but one does not ask even for gratitude in words. And she was in no hurry to explain. She sat in the warm shade, with all the greenness behind, and looked at him as if she found somehow a supreme satisfaction in the sight—as if she desired to prolong the moment, and even his curiosity and surprise. He on his part was stiff, disturbed, not happy at all. He did not like a woman to let herself down, to show any wrong side of her, any acquisitiveness, or equivocal sentiment. What did she want of him ? What had he to give ? The thought seemed to lessen himself by reason of lessening her in his eyes.

“ I tell you I am a very whimsical woman,” she said at length ; “ above all things I am fond of hearing every man’s story, and tracing out the different threads of life. It is my amusement,

like any other. If I bring this lady to speech of Dora, and show her how she could be of real advantage to both the girl and her father, will you promise me to come to me another time, and tell me, as far as you know, everything that has happened to you since the day you were born?"

Young Gordon's stiffness melted away. The surprise on his face, which had been mingled with annoyance, turned into mirth and pleasure. "You don't know what you are bringing on yourself," he said, "nothing very amusing. I have little in my own record. I never had any adventures. But if that is your fancy, surely I will, whenever you like, tell you everything that I know about myself."

She rose up, with the light fading a little, but yet leaving behind it a sweetness which was not generally in Miss Bethune's face. "Let your friend come in the afternoon at three any day—it is then her father takes his sleep—and ask for



Miss Bethune. I will see that it is made all right. And as for you, you will leave me your address?" she said, going with him towards the gate. "You said you believed your mother was living—is your father living too?"

"He died a long time ago," said the young man, and then added: "May I not know who it is that is standing our friend?"

Perhaps Miss Bethune did not hear him; certainly she let him out; and turned to lock the gate, without making any reply.

## CHAPTER IX.

DORA had now a great deal to do in her father's room. The two nurses had at last been got rid of, to the great relief of all in the house except Mrs. Simcox, whose bills shrank back at once to their original level, very different from what they had been, and who felt herself, besides, to be reduced to quite a lower level in point of society, her thoughts and imaginations having been filled, as well as those of Janie and Molly, by tales of the hospitals and sick-rooms, which made them feel as if translated into a world where the gaiety of perfect health and constant exercise triumphed over every distress. Janie and Molly had both determined to be nurses in the enthusiasm created by these recitals. They turned their little night-caps, the only things they had which could be

(160)

so converted, into imitation nurses' caps, and masqueraded in them in the spare moments when they could shut themselves into their little rooms and play at hospital. And the sitting-room downstairs returned for these young persons to its original dulness when the nurses went away. Dora was in her father's room all day, and required a great deal of help from Jane, the maid-of-all-work, in bringing up and taking away the things that were wanted: and Gilchrist watched over him by night. There was a great deal of beef tea and chicken broth to be prepared—no longer the time and trouble-saving luxuries of Brand's Essence and turtle soup. He would have none of these luxuries now. He inquired into every expense, and rejected presents, and was angry rather than grateful when anything was done for him. What he would have liked would have been to have eaten nothing at all, to have passed over meal-times, and lived upon a glass of

water or milk and a biscuit. But this could not be allowed ; and Mrs. Simcox had now a great deal of trouble in cooking for him, whereas before she had scarcely any at all. Mr. Mannering, indeed, was not an amiable convalescent. The breaking up of all the habits of his life was dreadful to him. The coming back to new habits was more dreadful still. He thought with horror of the debts that must have accumulated while he was ill ; and when he spoke of them, looked and talked as if the whole world had been in a conspiracy against him, instead of doing everything, and contriving everything, as was the real state of the case, for his good.

“ Let me have my bills, let me have my bills ; let me know how I stand,” he cried continually to Dr. Roland, who had the hardest ado to quiet him, to persuade him that for everything there is a reason. “ I know these women ought to be paid at once,” he would say. “ I know a man

like Vereker ought to have his fee every time he comes. You intend it very kindly, Roland, I know; but you are keeping me back, instead of helping me to recover." What was poor Dr. Roland to say? He was afraid to tell this proud man that everything was paid. That Vereker had taken but half fees, declaring that from a professional man of such distinction as Mr. Mannering, he ought, had the illness not been so long and troublesome, to have taken nothing at all,—was a possible thing to say; but not that Miss Bethune's purse had supplied these half fees. Even that they should merely be half was a kind of grievance to the patient. "I hope you told him that as soon as I was well enough I should see to it," he cried. "I have no claim to be let off so. Distinction! the distinction of a half man who never accomplished anything!"

"Come, Mannering, come, that will not do.

You are the first and only man in England in your own way."

"In my own way? And what a miserable petty way, a way that leads to nothing and nowhere!" he cried.

This mood did not contribute to recovery. After his laborious dressing, which occupied all the morning, he would sit in his chair doing nothing, saying nothing, turning with a sort of sickness of despair from books, not looking even at the paper, without a smile even for Dora. The only thing he would sometimes do was to note down figures with a pencil on a sheet of paper and add them up, and make attempts to balance them with the sum which quarter day brought him. Poor Mr. Mannering was refused all information about the sums he was owing; he put them down conjecturally, now adding something, now subtracting something. As a matter of fact his highest estimation was below the truth. And

then, by some unhappy chance, the bills that were lying in the sitting-room were brought to him. Alas! the foolishhest bills—bills which Dora's father, knowing that she was unprovided for, should never have incurred—bills for old books, for fine editions, for delicate scientific instruments. A man with only his income from the Museum, and his child to provide for, should never have thought of such things.

“Father,” said Dora, thinking of nothing but to rouse him, “there is a large parcel which has never been opened, which came from Fiddler's after you were taken ill. I had not any heart to open it to see what was in it; but perhaps it would amuse you to look at what is in it now.”

“Fiddler's?” he said, with a sick look of dismay. “Another—another! What do I want with books, when I have not a penny to pay my expenses, nor a place to hide my head?”

“Oh, father, don't talk so : only have patience,

and everything will come right," cried Dora, with the facile philosophy of youth. "They are great big books; I am sure they are something you wanted very much. It will amuse you to look at them, at least."

He did not consent in words, but a half motion of his head made Dora bring in, after a little delay to undo the large parcel, two great books covered with old-fashioned gilding, in brown leather, frayed at the corners—books to make the heart of a connoisseur dance, books looked out for in catalogues, followed about from one sale to another. Mr. Mannering's eyes, though they were dim and sunken, gave forth a momentary blaze. He put out his trembling hands for them, as Dora approached, almost tottering under the weight, carrying them in her arms.

"I will put them beside you on the table, father. Now you can look at them without tiring yourself, and I will run and fetch your beef tea.



Oh, good news!" cried Dora, flinging into Miss Bethune's room as she ran downstairs. "He is taking a little interest! I have just given him the books from Fiddler's, and he is looking a little like his own self."

She had interrupted what seemed a very serious conversation, perceiving this only now after she had delivered her tidings. She blushed, drew back, and begged Miss Bethune's pardon, with a curious look at the unknown visitor who was seated on the sofa by that lady's side. Dora knew all Miss Bethune's visitors by heart. She knew most of those even who were pensioners, and came for money or help, and had been used to be called in to help to entertain the few callers for years past. But this was some one altogether new, not like anybody she had ever seen before, very much agitated, with a grey and worn face, which got cruelly red by moments, looking ill, tired, miserable. Poor lady! and in deep mourn-

ing, which was no doubt the cause of her trouble, and a heavy crape veil hanging over her face. She gave a little cry at the sight of Dora, and clasped her hands. The gesture caused her veil to descend like a cloud, completely concealing her face.

“I beg your pardon, indeed. I did not know there was anybody here.”

Miss Bethune made her a sign to be silent, and laid her hand upon her visitor's arm, who was tremulously putting up her veil in the same dangerous overhanging position as before.

“This is Dora—as you must have guessed,” she said.

The lady began to cry, feebly sobbing, as if she could not restrain herself. “I saw it was—I saw it was,” she said.

“Dora, come here,” said Miss Bethune. “This lady is—a relation of yours—a relation of—your poor mamma,”

The lady sobbed, and held out her hands. Dora was not altogether pleased with her appearance. She might have cried at home, the girl thought. When you go out to pay a call, or even to make inquiries, you should make them and not cry : and there was something that was ridiculous in the position of the veil, ready to topple over in its heavy folds of crape. She watched it to see when the moment would come.

“Why ‘my poor mamma’?” said Dora. “Is it because mother is dead?”

“There are enough of reasons,” Miss Bethune said hastily.

Dora flung back her head with a sudden resistance and defiance. “I don’t know about mother. She has been dead ever since I remember ; but she was my mother, and nobody has any right to be sorry for her, as though that were a misfortune.”

“She is a little perverse thing,” said Miss

Bethune, "but she has a great spirit. Dora, come here. I will go and see about your papa's beef tea, while you come and speak to this lady." She stooped over the girl for a moment as she passed her going out. "And be kind," she whispered; "for she's very ill, poor thing, and very broken. Be merciful in your strength and in your youth."

Dora could not tell what this might mean. Merciful? She, who was still only a child, and, to her own consciousness, ordered about by everybody, and made nothing of. The stranger sat on the sofa, trembling and sobbing, her face of a sallow paleness, her eyes half extinguished in tears. The heavy folds of the crape hanging over her made the faded countenance appear as if looking out of a cave.

"I am afraid you are not well," said Dora, drawing slowly near.

"No, I am not at all well. Come here

and sit by me, will you? I am—dying, I think.”

“Oh, no,” said Dora, with a half horror, half pity. “Do not say that.”

The poor lady shook her head. “I should not mind, if perhaps it made people a little forgiving—a little indulgent. Oh, Dora, my child, is it you, really you, at last?”

Dora suffered her hand to be taken, suffered herself to be drawn close, and a tremulous kiss pressed upon her cheek. She did not know how to respond. She felt herself entangled in the great crape veil, and her face wet with the other's tears. She herself was touched by pity, but by a little contrariety as well, and objection to this sudden and so intimate embrace.

“I am very, very sorry if you are ill,” she said, disengaging herself as gently as possible. “My father has been very ill, so I know about it now; but I don't know you.”

“My darling,” the poor lady said. “My darling, my little child! my Dora, that I have thought and dreamed of night and day!”

Dora was more than ever confused. “But I don’t know you at all,” she said.

“No, that is what is most dreadful: not at all, not at all!—and I dying for the sight of you, and to hold you in my arms once before I die.”

She held the girl with her trembling arms, and the two faces, all entangled and overshadowed by the great black veil, looked into each other, so profoundly unlike, not a line in either which recalled or seemed to connect with the other. Dora was confounded and abashed by the close contact, and her absolute incapacity to respond to this enthusiasm. She put up her hands, which was the only thing that occurred to her, and threw quite back with a subdued yet energetic movement that confusing veil. She was conscious of

performing this act very quietly, but to the stranger the quick soft movement was like energy and strength personified.

“Oh, Dora,” she said, “you are not like me. I never was so lively, so strong as you are. I think I must have been a poor creature, always depending upon somebody. You could never be like that.”

“I don’t know,” said Dora. “Ought I to have been like you? Are we such near relations as that?”

“Just as near as—almost as near as—oh, child, how I have longed for you, and thought of you! You have never, never been out of my mind—not a day, Dora, scarcely an hour. Oh, if you only knew!”

“You must then have been very fond of my mother,” Dora said a little stiffly. She might have been less cold had this enthusiasm been less great.

“Your mother!” the stranger said. She broke out into audible weeping again, after comparative composure. “Oh, yes, I suppose I was—oh, yes, I suppose I was,” she said.

“You only suppose you were, and yet you are so fond as this of me?—which can be only,” said Dora, severely logical, “for her sake.”

The poor lady trembled, and was still for a moment; she then said, faltering: “We were so close together, she and I. We were like one. But a child is different—you are her and yourself too. But you are so young, my dearest, my dearest! You will not understand that.”

“I understand it partly,” said Dora; “but it is so strange that I never heard of you. Were my mother’s relations against my father? You must forgive me,” the girl said, withdrawing herself a little, sitting very upright; “but father, you know, has been everything to me. Father and I are one. I should like very much to hear about



mamma, who must have died so long ago: but my first thought must always be for father, who has been everything to me, and I to him."

A long minute passed, during which the stranger said nothing. Her head was sunk upon her breast; her hand—which was on Dora's waist—quivered, the nervous fingers beating unconsciously upon Dora's firm smooth belt.

"I have nothing, nothing to say to you against your father. Oh, nothing!—not a word! I have no complaint—no complaint! He is a good man, your father. And to have you cling to him, stand up for him, is not that enough?—is not that enough," she cried, with a shrill tone, "whatever failed?"

"Then," said Dora, pursuing her argument, "mamma's relations were not friends to him?"

The lady withdrew her arm from Dora's waist. She clasped her tremulous hands together, as if

in supplication. "Nothing was done against him—oh, nothing, nothing!" she cried. "There was no one to blame, everybody said so. It was a dreadful fatality; it was a thing no one could have foreseen or guarded against. Oh, my Dora, couldn't you give a little love, a little kindness, to a poor woman, even though she was not what you call a friend to your father? She never was his enemy—never, never!—never had an evil thought of him!—never wished to harm him—oh, never, never, never!" she cried.

She swayed against Dora's breast, rocking herself in uncontrolled distress, and Dora's heart was touched by that involuntary contact, and by the sight of an anguish which was painfully real, though she did not understand what it meant. With a certain protecting impulse, she put her own arm round the weeping woman to support her. "Don't cry," she said, as she might have said to a child.

“I will not cry. I will be very glad, and very happy, if you will only give me a little of your love, Dora,” the lady sobbed in a broken voice. “A little of your love,—not to take it from your father,—a little, just a little! Oh, my child, my child!”

“Are you my mother’s sister?” the girl asked solemnly.

The stranger raised her head again, with a look which Dora did not understand. Her eyes were full of tears, and of a wistful appeal which said nothing to the creature to whom it was addressed. After a moment, with a pathetic cry of pain and self-abandonment, she breathed forth a scarcely intelligible “Yes”.

“Then now I know,” said Dora, in a more satisfied tone. She was not without emotion herself. It was impossible to see so much feeling and not to be more or less affected by it, even when one did not understand, or even felt it to be

extreme. "Then I will call you aunt, and we shall know where we are," she added. "I am very glad to have relations, as everybody has them. May I mention you to father? It must be long since you quarrelled, whatever it was about. I shall say to him: 'You need not take any notice, but I am glad, very glad, to have an aunt like other girls'."

"No, no, no, no—not to him! You must not say a word."

"I don't know how I can keep a secret from father," Dora said.

"Oh, child," cried the lady, "do not be too hard on us! It would be hard for him, too, and he has been ill. Don't say a word to him—for his own sake!"

"It will be very strange to keep a secret from father," Dora said reflectively. Then she added: "To be sure, there have been other things—about the nurses, and all that. And he is still

very weak. I will not mention it, since you say it is for his own sake."

"For we could never meet—never, never!" cried the lady, with her head on Dora's breast—"never, unless perhaps one of us were dying. I could never look him in the face, though perhaps if I were dying —— Dora, kiss your poor—your poor, poor—relation. Oh, my child! oh, my darling! kiss me as that!"

"Dear aunt," said Dora quietly. She spoke in a very subdued tone, in order to keep down the quite uncalled-for excitement and almost passion in the other's voice. She could not but feel that her new relation was a person with very little self-control, expressing herself far too strongly, with repetitions and outcries quite uncalled for in ordinary conversation, and that it was her, Dora's, business to exercise a mollifying influence. "This is for you," she said, touching the sallow, thin cheek with her young rosy lips.

“And this is for poor mamma—poor young mamma, whom I never saw.”

The lady gave a quick cry, and clutched the girl in her trembling arms.

## CHAPTER X.

THE meeting with her new relation had a great effect upon Dora's mind. It troubled her, though there was no reason in the world why the discovery that her mother had a sister, and she herself an aunt, should be painful. An aunt is not a very interesting relation generally, not enough to make a girl's heart beat ; but it added a complication to the web of altogether new difficulties in which Dora found herself entangled. Everything had been so simple in the old days—those dear old days now nearly three months off, before Mr. Mannering fell ill, to which now Dora felt herself go back with such a sense of happiness and ease, perhaps never to be known again. Then everything had been above board : there had been no payments to make that were

not made naturally by her father, the fountain-head of everything, who gave his simple orders, and had them fulfilled, and provided for every necessity. Now Dora feared a knock at the door of his room lest it should be some indiscreet messenger bringing direct a luxury or novelty which it had been intended to smuggle in so that he might not observe it, or introduce with some one's compliments as an accidental offering to the sick man. To hurry off Janie or Molly downstairs with these good things intended to tempt the invalid's appetite, to stamp a secret foot at the indiscretions of Jane, who would bring in the bill for these dainties, or announce their arrival loud out, rousing Mr. Mannering to inquiries, and give a stern order that such extravagances should be no more, were now common experiences to Dora. She had to deceive him, which was, Miss Bethune assured her, for his good, but which Dora felt with a sinking heart was not at



all for her own good, and made her shrink from her father's eye. To account for the presence of some rare wine which was good for him by a little story which, though it had been carefully taught her by Dr. Roland or Miss Bethune, was not true—to make out that it was the most natural thing in the world that *patés de fois gras*, and the strongest soups and essence should be no more expensive than common beef tea, the manufacture of Bloomsbury, because the doctor knew some place where they were to be had at wholesale rates for almost nothing—these were devices now quite familiar to her.

It was no worse to conceal the appearance of this new and strange personage on the scene, the relation of whom she had never heard, and whose existence was to remain a secret; but still it was a bigger secret than any that concerned the things that were to eat or drink, or even Mrs. Simcox's bills. Concealment is an art that has to be care-

fully learnt, like other arts, and it is extremely difficult to some minds, who will more easily acquire the most elaborate handicraft than the trick of selecting what is to be told and what is not to be told. It was beyond all description difficult to Dora. She was ready to betray herself at almost every moment, and had it not been that her own mind was much perturbed and troubled by her strange visitor, and by attempts to account for her to herself, she never could have succeeded in it. What could the offence be that made it impossible for her father ever to meet the sister of his wife again? Dora had learned from novels a great deal about the mysteries of life, some which her natural mind rejected as absurd, some which she contemplated with awe as tragic possibilities entirely out of the range of common life. She had read about implacable persons who once offended could never forgive, and of those who revenged themselves and pursued a feud to the

death. But the idea of her father in either of these characters was too ridiculous to be dwelt upon for a moment. And there had been no evil intended, no harm,—only a fatality. What is a fatality? To have such dreadful issues, a thing must be serious, very terrible. Dora was bewildered and overawed. She put this question to Miss Bethune, but received no light on the subject. “A fatality is a thing that is not intentional—that happens by accident—that brings harm when you mean nothing but good,” that authority said.

“But how should that be? It says in the Bible that people must not do evil that good may come. But to do good that evil may come, I never heard of that.”

“There are many things in the world that you never heard of, Dora, my dear.”

“Oh yes, yes, I know,” cried the girl impatiently. “You are always saying that, because I am young—as if it were my fault that I am

young ; but that does not change anything. It is no matter, then, whether you have any meaning in what you do or not ? ”

“ Sometimes it appears as if it was no matter. We walk blindly in this world, and often do things unawares that we would put our hands in the fire rather than do. You say an unguarded word, meaning nothing, and it falls to the ground, as you think, but afterwards springs up into a poisonous tree and blights your life ; or you take a turn to the right hand instead of the left when you go out from your own door, and it means ruin and death—that’s fatality, and it’s everywhere,” said Miss Bethune, with a deep sigh.

“ I do not believe in it,” said Dora, standing straight and strong, like a young tree, and holding her head high.

“ Nor did I, my dear, when I was your age,” Miss Bethune said.

At this moment there was a light knock at the door, and there appeared suddenly the young man whom Miss Bethune had met in the Square, and who had come as the messenger of the lady who was Dora's aunt.

"She is asking me what fatality is," said Miss Bethune. "I wonder if you have any light to throw on the subject? You are nearer her age than I."

The two young people looked at each other. Dora, though she was only sixteen, was more of a personage than the young Gordon whom she had not seen before. She looked at him with the condescension of a very young girl brought up among elder people, and apt to feel a boundless imaginative superiority over those of her own age. A young man was a slight person to Dora. She was scarcely old enough to feel any of the interest in him which exists naturally between the youth and the maiden. She looked at him from her

pedestal, half scornful beforehand of anything he might say.

“Fatality?” he said. “I think it’s a name people invent for anything particularly foolish which they do, when it turns out badly : though they might have known it would turn out badly all the time.”

“That is exactly what I think,” cried Dora, clapping her hands.

“This is the young lady,” said young Gordon, “whom I used to help to pack the toys for. I hope she will let me call her Miss Dora, for I don’t know her by any other name.”

“To pack the toys?” said Dora. Her face grew blank, then flashed with a sudden light, then grew quite white and still again, with a gasp of astonishment and recognition. “Oh!” she cried, and something of disappointment was in her tone, “was it—was it *she* that sent them?” In the commotion of her feelings a sudden deep red

followed the paleness. Dora was all fancy, changeableness, fastidiousness, imagination, as was natural to her age. Why was she disappointed to know that her yearly presents coming out of the unseen, the fairy gifts that testified to some love unknown, came from so legitimate a source, from her mother's sister, her own nearest relation—the lady of the other day? I cannot tell how it was, nor could she, nor any one, but it was so; and she felt this visionary, absurd disappointment go to the bottom of her heart. “Oh,” she repeated, growing blank again, with a sort of opaque shadow closing over the brightness of her eyes and clouding her face, “so that was where my boxes came from? And you helped to pack the toys? I ought to have known,” said Dora, very sedately, feeling as if she had suddenly fallen from a great height.

“Yes,” said Miss Bethune, “we ought to have thought of that at once. Who else could have

followed with such a faithful imagination, Dora? Who could have remembered your age, and the kind of things you want, and how you would grow, but a kind woman like that, with all the feelings of a mother? Oh, we should have thought of it before."

Dora at first made no reply. Her face generally so changeable and full of expression, settled down more and more into opaqueness and a blank rigidity. She was deeply disappointed, though why she could not have told—nor what dream of a fairy patroness, an exalted friend, entirely belonging to the realms of fancy, she had conceived in her childish imagination as the giver of these gifts. At all events, the fact was so. Mrs. Bristow, with her heavy crape veil, ready to fall at any moment over her face, with the worn lines of her countenance, the flush and heat of emotion, her tears and repetitions, was a disappointing image to come between her and the vision of a tender friend,



too delicate, too ethereal a figure for any commonplace embodiment which had been a kind of tutelary genius in Dora's dreams all her life. Any one in actual flesh and blood would have been a shock after that long-cherished, visionary dream. And young Gordon's laughing talk of the preparation of the box, and of his own suggestions as to its contents, and the picture he conjured up of a mystery which was half mischievous, and in which there was not only a desire to please but to puzzle the distant recipient of all these treasures, both offended and shocked the girl in the fantastic delicacy of her thoughts.

Without being himself aware of it, the young man gave a glimpse into the distant Southern home, in which it would appear he had been brought up, which was in reality very touching and attractive, though it reduced Dora to a more and more strong state of revolt. On the other hand, Miss Bethune listened to him with a rapt

air of happiness, which was more wonderful still—asking a hundred questions, never tiring of any detail. Dora bore it all as long as she could, feeling herself sink more and more from the position of a young princess, mysteriously loved and cherished by a distant friend, half angelic, half queenly, into that of a little girl, whom a fantastic kind relation wished to pet and to bewilder, half in love and half in fun, taking the boy into her confidence, who was still more to her and nearer to her than Dora. She could not understand how Miss Bethune could sit and listen with that rapt countenance; and she finally broke in, in the very midst of the narrative to which she had listened (had any one taken any notice) with growing impatience, to say suddenly, “In the meantime father is by himself, and I shall have to go to him,” with a tone of something like injury in her voice.

“But Gilchrist is there if he wants anything, Dora.”

“Gilchrist is very kind, but she is not quite the same as me,” said Dora, holding her head high.

She made Mr. Gordon a little gesture, something between farewell and dismissal, in a very lofty way, impressing upon the young man a sense of having somehow offended, which he could not understand. He himself was very much interested in Dora. He had known of her existence for years. She had been a sort of secret between him and the wife of his guardian, who, he was well aware, never discussed with her husband or mentioned in his presence the child who was so mysteriously dear to her; but bestowed all her confidence on this subject on the boy who had grown up in her house and filled to her the place of a son. He had liked the confidence and the secret and the mystery, without much inquiring what they meant. They meant, he supposed, a family quarrel, such as that which had affected all

his own life. Such things are a bore and a nuisance ; but, after all, don't matter very much to any but those with whom they originate. And young Gordon was not disposed to trouble his mind with any sort of mystery now.

“Have I said anything I should not have said? Is she displeased?” he said.

“It matters very little if she is displeased or not, a fantastic little girl!” cried Miss Bethune. “Go on, go on with what you are saying. I take more interest in it than words can say.”

But it was not perhaps exactly the same thing to continue that story in the absence of the heroine whose name was its centre all through. She was too young to count with serious effect in the life of a man ; and yet it would be difficult to draw any arbitrary line in respect to age with a tall girl full of that high flush of youth which adopts every semblance in turn, and can put all the dignity of womanhood in the eyes of a child. Young Gor-

don's impulse slackened in spite of himself; he was pleased, and still more amused, by the interest he excited in this lady, who had suddenly taken him into her intimacy with no reason that he knew of, and was so anxious to know all his story. It was droll to see her listening in that rapt way,—droll, yet touching too. She had said that he reminded her of somebody she knew—perhaps it was some one who was dead, a young brother, a friend of earlier years. He laughed a little to himself, though he was also affected by this curious unexpected interest in him. But he certainly had not the same freedom and eloquence in talking of the old South American home, now broken up, and the visionary little maiden, who, all unknown herself, had lent it a charm, when Dora was gone. Neither, perhaps, did Miss Bethune concentrate her interest on that part that related to Dora. When he began to flag she asked him questions of a different kind.

“Those guardians of yours must have been very good to you—as good as parents?” she said.

“Very good, but not perhaps like parents ; for I remember my father very well, and I still have a mother, you know.”

“Your father,” she said, turning away her head a little, “was devoted to you, I suppose?”

“Devoted to me?” he said, with a little surprise, and then laughed. “He was kind enough. We got on very well together. Do men and their sons do more than that?”

“I know very little about men and their sons,” she said hastily ; “about men and women I maybe know a little, and not much to their advantage. Oh, you are there, Gilchrist ! This is the gentleman I was speaking to you about. Do you see the likeness?”

Gilchrist advanced a step into the room, with much embarrassment in her honest face. She

uttered a broken laugh, which was like a giggle, and began as usual to fold hems in her apron.

“I cannot say, mem, that I see a resemblance to any person,” she said.

“You are just a stupid creature!” said her mistress,—“good for nothing but to make an invalid’s beef tea. Just go away, go away and do that.” She turned suddenly to young Gordon, as Gilchrist went out of the room. “That stupid woman’s face doesn’t bring anything to your mind?” she said hastily.

“Bring anything to my mind?” he cried, with great surprise. “What should she bring to my mind?”

“It was just a fancy that came into mine. Do you remember the scene in *Guy Mannering*, where Bertram first sees Dominie Sampson? Eh, I hope your education has not been neglected in that great particular?”

"I remember the scene," he said, with a smile.

"It was perhaps a little of what you young folk call melodramatic: but Harry Bertram's imagination gets a kind of shock, and he remembers. And so you are a reader of Sir Walter, and mind that scene?"

"I remember it very well," said the young man, bewildered. "But about the maid? You said ——"

"Oh, nothing about the maid; she's my faithful maid, but a stupid woman as ever existed. Never you mind what I said. I say things that are very silly from time to time. But I would like to know how you ever heard your mother was living, when you have never seen her, nor know anything about her? I suppose not even her name?"

"My father told me so when he was dying: he told Mr. Bristow so, but he gave us no further



information. I gathered that my mother —— It is painful to betray such an impression.”

She looked at him with a deep red rising over her cheeks, and a half-defiant look. “I am old enough to be your mother, you need not hesitate to speak before me,” she said.

“It is not that; it is that I can’t associate that name with anything—anything—to be ashamed of.”

“I would hope not, indeed!” she cried, standing up, towering over him as if she had added a foot to her height. She gave forth a long fiery breath, and then asked, “Did he dare to say that?” with a heaving breast.

“He did not say it: but my guardian thought ——”

“Oh, your guardian thought! That was what your guardian would naturally think. A man—that is always of an evil mind where women are concerned! And what did she think?—her,

his wife, the other guardian, the woman I have seen?"

"She is not like any one else," said young Gordon; "she will never believe in any harm. You have given me one scene, I will give you another. She said what Desdemona said, 'I do not believe there was ever any such woman'."

"Bless her! But oh, there are—there are!" cried Miss Bethune, tears filling her eyes, "in life as well as in men's ill imaginations. But not possible to her or to me!"

## CHAPTER XI.

YOUNG Gordon had gone, and silence had fallen over Miss Bethune's room. It was a commonplace room enough, well-sized, for the house was old and solid, with three tall windows swathed in red rep curtains, partially softened but not extinguished by the white muslin ones which had been put up over them. Neither Miss Bethune nor her maid belonged to the decorative age. They had no principles as to furniture, but accepted what they had, with rather a preference than otherwise for heavy articles in mahogany, and things that were likely to last. They thought Mr. Mannering's dainty furniture and his faded silken curtains were rather of the nature of trumpery. People could think so in these days, and in the locality of Bloomsbury, without being

entirely abandoned in character, or given up to every vicious sentiment. Therefore, I cannot say, as I should be obliged to say now-a-days, in order to preserve any sympathy for Miss Bethune in the reader's mind, that the room was pretty, and contained an indication of its mistress's character in every carefully arranged corner. It was a room furnished by Mrs. Simcox, the landlady. It had been embellished, perhaps, by a warm hearthrug—not Persian, however, by any means—and made comfortable by a few easy chairs. There were a number of books about, and there was one glass full of wallflowers on the table, very sweet in sober colours—a flower that rather corresponds with the mahogany, and the old-fashioned indifference to ornament and love of use. You would have thought, had you looked into this room, which was full of spring sunshine, bringing out the golden tints in the wallflower, and reflected in the big mirror above the fireplace,

that it was empty after young Gordon had gone. But it was not empty. It was occupied instead by a human heart, so overbursting with passionate hope, love, suspense, and anxiety, that it was a wonder the silence did not tinge, and the quiet atmosphere betray that strain and stress of feeling. Miss Bethune sat in the shadowed corner between the fireplace and the farther window, with the whiteness of the curtains blowing softly in her face as the air came in. That flutter dazzled the beholder, and made Gilchrist think when she entered that there was nobody there. The maid looked round, and then clasped her hands and said to herself softly : “ She’ll be gane into her bedroom to greet there ”.

“ And why should I greet, you foolish woman ? ” cried Miss Bethune from her corner, with a thrill in her voice which betrayed the commotion in her mind.

Gilchrist started so violently that the bundle

of clean "things," fresh and fragrant from the country cart which had brought home the washing, fell from her arms. "Oh, mem, if I had kent you were there."

"My bonnie clean things!" cried Miss Bethune, "with the scent of the grass upon them—and now they're all spoiled with the dust of Bloomsbury! Gather them up and carry them away, and then you can come back here." She remained for a moment as quiet as before, after Gilchrist had hurried away; but any touch would have been sufficient to move her in her agitation, and presently she rose and began to pace about the room. "Gone to my room to greet there, is that what she thinks? Like Mary going to the grave to weep there. No, no, that's not the truth. It's the other way. I might be going to laugh, and to clap my hands, as they say in the Psalms. But laughing is not the first expression of joy. I would maybe be more like greeting, as she says.

A person laughs in idleness, for fun, not for joy. Joy has nothing, nothing but the old way of tears, which is just a contradiction. And maybe, after all, she was right. I'll go to my room and weep for thankfulness, and lightheartedness, and joy."

"Oh, mem," cried Gilchrist, coming in, "gang softly, gang softly! You're more sure than any mortal person has a right to be."

"Ye old unbeliever," cried Miss Bethune, pausing in the midst of her sob. "What has mortality to do with evidence? It would be just as true if I were to die to-morrow, for that matter."

"Eh, mem," cried Gilchrist again, "ye're awfu' easy to please in the way of evidence. What do you call evidence? A likeness ye think ye see, but I canna; and there's naething in a likeness. Miss Dora is no more like her papaw than me, there is nothing to be lippened to in the like of that. And then the age—that would

maybe be about the same, I grant ye that, so much as it comes to ; and a name that is no' the right name, but a kind of an approach to it."

"You are a bonnie person," cried Miss Bethune, "to take authority upon you about names, and never to think of the commonest old Scotch custom, that the son drops or turns the other way the name the father has taken to his own. I hope I know better ! If nothing had ever happened, if the lad had been bred and trained at home, he would be Gordon, just as sure as he is Gordon now.'

"I'm no' a person of quality, mem," said Gilchrist, holding her ground. "I have never set up for being wan of the gentry : it would ill become me, being just John Gilchrist the smith's daughter, and your servant-woman, that has served you this five and twenty years. But there are as many Gordons in Aberdeen as there are kirk steeples in this weary London town."

Miss Bethune made an impatient gesture.



“You’re a sagacious person, Gilchrist, altogether, and might be a ruling elder if you were but a man : but I think, perhaps I know what’s in it as well as you do, and if I’m satisfied that a thing is, I will not yield my faith, as you might know by this time, neither to the Lord President himself, nor even to you.”

“Eh, bless me, mem, but I ken that weel !” cried Gilchrist ; “and if I had thought you were taking it on that high line, never word would have come out of my mouth.”

“I am taking it on no high line—but I see what is for it as well as what is against it. I have kept my head clear,” said Miss Bethune. “On other occasions, I grant you, I may have let myself go : but in all this I have been like a judge, and refused to listen to the voice in my own heart. But it was there all the time, though I crushed it down. How can the like of you understand ? You’ve never felt a baby’s cry go into

the very marrow of your bones. I've set the evidence all out, and pled the cause before my own judgment, never listening one word to the voice in my heart." Miss Bethune spoke with greater and greater vehemence, but here paused to calm herself. "The boy that was carried off would have been twenty-five on the eighteenth of next month (as well you know), and this boy is just on five and twenty, he told me with his own lips; and his father told him with his dying breath that he had a mother living. He had the grace to do that! Maybe," said Miss Bethune, dropping her voice, which had again risen in excitement, "he was a true penitent when it came to that. I wish no other thing. Much harm and misery, God forgive him, has he wrought; but I wish no other thing. It would have done my heart good to think that his was touched and softened at the last, to his Maker at least, if no more."

“ Oh, mem, the one would go with the other, if what you think is true.”

“ No,” said Miss Bethune, shutting her lips tight, “ no, there’s no necessity. If it had been so what would have hindered him to give the boy chapter and verse ? Her name is So-and-so, you will hear of her at such a place. But never that — never that, though it would have been so easy ! Only that he had a mother living, a mother that the guardian man and the lad himself divined must have been a —— Do you not call that evidence ?” cried Miss Bethune, with a harsh triumph. “ Do you not divine our man in that ? Oh, but I see him as clear as if he had signed his name.”

“ Dear mem,” cried Gilchrist, with a “ tchick, tchick,” of troubled sympathy and spectatorship, “ you canna wish he had been a true penitent and yet think of him like that.”

“ And who are you to lay down the law and say what I can do ?” cried the lady. She added,

with a wave of her hand and her head : “ We’ll not argue that question : but if there ever was an action more like the man !—just to give the hint and clear his conscience, but leave the woman’s name to be torn to pieces by any dozen in the place ! If that is not evidence, I don’t know what evidence is.”

Gilchrist could say nothing in reply. She shook her head, though whether in agreement or in dissidence it would have been difficult to tell, and folded hem upon hem on her apron, with her eyes fixed upon that, as if it had been the most important of work. “ I was wanting to speak,” she said, “ when you had a moment to listen to me, about two young folk.”

“ What two young folk ? ” Miss Bethune’s eyes lighted up with a gleam of soft light, her face grew tender in every line. “ But Dora is too young, she is far too young for anything of the kind,” she said.

“Eh, mem,” cried Gilchrist, with a mingling of astonishment, admiration, and pity, “can ye think of nothing but yon strange young man?”

“I am thinking of nothing but the bairn, the boy that was stolen away before he knew his right hand from his left, and now is come home.”

“Aweel, aweel,” said Gilchrist, “we will just have to put up with it, as we have put up with it before. And sooner or later her mind will come back to what’s reasonable and true. I was speaking not of the young gentleman, or of any like him, but of the two who were up in the attics that you were wanting to save, if save them ye can. They are just handless creatures, the one and the other ; but the woman’s no’ an ill person, poor thing, and would do well if she knew the way. And a baby coming, and the man just a weirdless, feckless, ill man.”

“He cannot help it if he is ill, Gilchrist.”

“Maybe no’,” said Gilchrist cautiously. “I’m

never just so sure of that ; but, anyway, he's a delicate creature, feared for every thing, and for a Christian eye upon him, which is the worst of all ; and wherefore we should take them upon our shoulders, folk that we have nothing to do with, a husband and wife, and the family that's coming ——”

“Oh, woman,” said her mistress, “if they have got just a step out of the safe way in the beginning, is that not reason the more for helping them back ? And how can I ever know what straits *he* might have been put to, and his mother ignorant, and not able to help him ?”

“Eh, but I'm thankful to hear you say that again !” Gilchrist cried.

“Not that I can ever have that fear now, for a finer young man, or a more sweet ingenuous look ! But no credit to any of us, Gilchrist. I'm thankful to those kind people that have brought him up ; but it will always be a pain in my heart

that I have had nothing to do with the training of him, and will never be half so much to him as that —that lady, who is in herself a poor, weakly woman, if I may say such a word.”

“It is just a very strange thing,” said Gilchrist, “that yon lady is as much taken up about our Miss Dora as you are, mem, about the young lad.”

“Ah!” said Miss Bethune, with a nod of her head, “but in a different way. Her mother’s sister—very kind and very natural, but oh, how different! I am to contrive to take Dora to see her, for I fear she is not long for this world, Gilchrist. The young lad, as you call him, will soon have nobody to look to but ——”

“Mem!” cried Gilchrist, drawing herself up, and looking her mistress sternly in the face.

Miss Bethune confronted her angrily for a moment, then coloured high, and flung down, as it were, her arms. “No, no!” she cried—“no, you are unjust to me, as you have been many

times before. I am not glad of her illness, poor thing. God forbid it! I am not exulting, as you think, that she will be out of my way. Oh, Gilchrist, do you think so little of me—a woman you have known this long, long lifetime—as to believe that?”

“Eh, mem,” said Gilchrist, “when you and me begin to think ill of each other, the world will come to an end. We ken each ither far too well for that. Ye may scold me whiles when I little deserve it, and I put a thing upon you for a minnit that is nae blame of yours; but na, na, there is nae misjudging possible between you and me.”

It will be seen that Gilchrist was very cautious in the confession of faith just extorted. She was no flatterer. She knew of what her mistress was capable better than that mistress herself did, and had all her weaknesses on the tips of her fingers. But she had no intention of discouraging that



faulty but well-beloved woman. She went on in indulgent, semi-maternal tones : “ You’ve had a great deal to excite you and trouble you, and in my opinion it would do ye a great deal of good, and help ye to get back to your ordinary, if you would just put everything else away, and consider with me what was to be done for thae two feckless young folk. If the man is not put to do anything, he will be in more trouble than ever, or I’m no judge.”

“ And it might have been him ! ” said Miss Bethune to herself—the habitual utterance which had inspired so many acts of charity. “ I think you are maybe right, Gilchrist,” she added ; “ it will steady me, and do me good. Run downstairs and see if the doctor is in. He knows more about him than we do, and we’ll just have a good consultation and see what is the best to be done.”

The doctor was in, and came directly, and there was a very anxious consultation about the

two young people, to whose apparently simple, commonplace mode of life there had come so sudden an interruption. Dr. Roland had done more harm than good by his action in the matter. He confessed that had he left things alone, and not terrified the young coward on the verge of crime, the catastrophe might perhaps, by more judicious ministrations, have been staved off. Terror of being found out is not always a preservative, it sometimes hurries on the act which it ought to prevent; and the young man who had been risking his soul in petty peculations which he might have made up for, fell over the precipice into a great one in sheer cowardice, when the doctor's keen eye read him, and made him tremble. Dr. Roland took blame to himself. He argued that it was of no use trying to find Hesketh another situation. "He has no character, and no one will take him without a character: or if some Quixote did, on your word, Miss Bethune, or

mine, who are very little to be trusted in such a case, the unfortunate wretch would do the same again. It's not his fault, he cannot help himself. His grandfather, or perhaps a more distant relation ——”

“Do not speak nonsense to me, doctor, for I will not listen to it,” said Miss Bethune. “When there's a poor young wife in the case, and a baby coming, how dare you talk about the fool's grandfather?”

“Mem and sir,” said Gilchrist, “if you would maybe listen for a moment to me. My mistress, she has little confidence in my sense, but I have seen mony a thing happen in my day, and twenty years' meddlin' and mellin' with poor folk under her, that is always too ready with her siller, makes ye learn if ye were ever sae silly. Now, here is what I would propose. He's maybe more feckless than anything worse. He will get no situation without a character, and it will not do

for you—neither her nor you, sir, asking your pardon—to make yourselves caution for a silly gowk like yon. But set him up some place in a little shop of his ain. He'll no cheat himsel', and the wife she can keep an eye on him. If it's in him to do weel he'll do weel, or at least we'll see if he tries; and if no', in that case ye'll ken just what you will lose. That is what I would advise, if you would lippen to me, though I am not saying I am anything but a stupid person, and often told so," Gilchrist said.

"It is not a bad idea, however," said Dr. Roland.

"Neither it is. But the hussy, to revenge herself on me like that!" her mistress cried.

## CHAPTER XII.

YOUNG Gordon left the house in Bloomsbury after he had delivered the message which was the object of his visit, but which he had forgotten in the amusement of seeing Dora, and the interest of these new scenes which had so suddenly opened up in his life. His object had been to beg that Miss Bethune would visit the lady for whom it had been his previous object to obtain an entrance into the house in which Dora was. Mrs. Bristow was ill, and could not go again, and she wanted to see Dora's friend, who could bring Dora herself, accepting the new acquaintance for the sake of the child on whom her heart was set, but whom for some occult reason she would not call to her in the more natural way. Gordon did not believe in occult reasons. He had no mind for mysteries ;

and was fully convinced that whatever quarrel there might have been, no man would be so ridiculously vindictive as to keep his child apart from a relation, her mother's sister, who was so anxious to see her.

But he was the kindest-hearted youth in the world, and though he smiled at these mysteries he yet respected them in the woman who had been everything to him in his early life, his guardian's wife, whom he also called aunt in the absence of any other suitable title. She liked that sort of thing—to make mountains of molehills, and to get over them with great expenditure of strategy and sentiment, when he was persuaded she might have marched straight forward and found no difficulty. But it was her way, and it had always been his business to see that she had her way and was crossed by nobody. He was so accustomed to her in all her weaknesses that he accepted them simply as the course of nature. Even her illness

did not alarm or trouble him. She had been delicate since ever he could remember. From the time when he entered upon those duties of son or nephew which dated so far back in his life, he had always been used to make excuses to her visitors on account of her delicacy, her broken health, her inability to bear the effects of the hot climate. This was her habit, as it was the habit of some women to ride and of some to drive; and as it was the habit of her household to accept whatever she did as the only things for her to do, he had been brought up frankly in that faith.

His own life, too, had always appeared very simple and natural to Harry, though perhaps it scarcely seemed so to the spectator. His childhood had been passed with his father, who was more or less of an adventurer, and who had accustomed his son to ups and downs which he was too young to heed, having always his wants attended to, and somebody to play with, whatever

happened. Then he had been transferred to the house of his guardian on a footing which he was too young to inquire into, which was indeed the simple footing of a son, receiving everything from his new parents, as he had received everything from his old. To find on his guardian's death that he had nothing, that no provision was made for him, was something of a shock ; as had been the discovery on his twenty-first birthday that his guardian was simply his benefactor, and had no trust in respect to him. It came over Harry like a cloud on both occasions that he had no profession, no way of making his own living ; and that a state of dependence like that in which he had been brought up could not continue. But the worst time in the world to break the link which had subsisted so long, or to take from his aunt, as he called her, the companion upon whom she leant for everything, was at the moment when her husband was gone, and there was nobody else



except a maid to take care of her helplessness. He could not do this ; he was as much bound to her, to provide for all her wants, and see that she missed nothing of her wonted comforts ; nay, almost more than if he had been really her son. If it had not been for his easy nature, the light heart which goes with perfect health, great simplicity of mind, and a thoroughly generous disposition, young Gordon had enough of uncertainty in his life to have made him very serious, if not unhappy. But, as a matter of fact, he was neither. He took the days as they came, as only those can do who are to that manner born. When he thought on the subject, he said to himself that should the worst come to the worst, a young fellow of his age, with the use of his hands and a head on his shoulders, could surely find something to do, and that he would not mind what it was.

This was very easy to say, and Gordon was

not at all aware what the real difficulties are in finding something to do. But had he known better, it would have done him no good ; and his ignorance, combined as it was with constant occupations of one kind or another, was a kind of bliss. There was a hope, too, in his mind, that merely being in England would mend matters. It must open some mode of independence for him. Mrs. Bristow would settle somewhere, buy a "place," an estate, as it had always been the dream of her husband to do, and so give him occupation. Something would come of it that would settle the question for him ; the mere certainty in his mind of this cleared away all clouds, and made the natural brightness of his temperature more assured than ever.

This young man had no education to speak of. He had read innumerable books, which do not count for very much in that way. He had, however, been brought up in what was supposed "the

best" of society, and he had the advantage of that, which is no small advantage. He was at his ease in consequence, wherever he went, not supposing that any one looked down on him, or that he could be refused admittance anywhere. As he walked back with his heart at ease—full of an amused pleasure in the thought of Dora, whom he had known for years, and who had been, though he had never till to-day seen her, a sort of little playfellow in his life—walking westward from the seriousness of Bloomsbury, through the long line of Oxford Street, and across Hyde Park to the great hotel in which Mrs. Bristow had established herself, the young man, though he had not a penny, and was a mere colonial, to say the best of him, felt himself returning to a more congenial atmosphere, the region of ease and leisure, and beautiful surroundings, to which he had been born. He had not any feature of the man of fashion, yet he belonged instinctively to the *jeunesse dorée*

wherever he went. He went along, swinging his cane, with a relief in his mind to be delivered from the narrow and noisy streets. He had been accustomed all his life to luxury, though of a different kind from that of London, and he smiled at the primness and respectability of Bloomsbury by instinct, though he had no right to do so. He recognised the difference of the traffic in Piccadilly, and distinguished between that great thoroughfare and the other with purely intuitive discrimination. Belgravia was narrow and formal to the Southerner, but yet it was different. All these intuitions were in him, he could not tell how.

He went back to his aunt with the pleasure of having something to say which he knew would please her. Dora, as has been said, had been their secret between them for many years. He had helped to think of toys and pretty trifles to send her, and the boxes had been the subject of many a consultation, calling forth tears from Mrs.

Bristow, but pure fun to the young man, who thought of the unknown recipient as of a little sister whom he had never seen. He meant to please the kind woman who had been a mother to him, by telling her about Dora, how pretty she was, how tall, how full of character, delightful and amusing to behold, how she was half angry with him for knowing so much of her, half pleased, how she flashed from fun to seriousness, from kindness to quick indignation, and on the whole disapproved of him, but only in a way that was amusing, that he was not afraid of. Thus he went in cheerful, and intent upon making the invalid cheerful too.

A hotel is a hotel all the world over, a place essentially vulgar, commonplace, venal, the travesty of a human home. This one, however, was as stately as it could be, with a certain size about the building, big stairs, big rooms, at the end of one of which he found his patroness lying, in an

elaborate dressing-gown, on a large sofa, with the vague figure of a maid floating about in the semi-darkness. The London sun in April is not generally violent ; but all the blinds were down, the curtains half drawn over the windows, and the room so deeply shadowed that even young Gordon's sharp eyes coming out of the keen daylight did not preserve him from knocking against one piece of furniture after another as he made his way to the patient's side.

"Well, Harry dear, is she coming?" a faint voice said.

"I hope so, aunt. She was sorry to know you were ill. I told her you were quite used to being ill, and always patient over it. Are things going any better to-day?"

"They will never be better, Harry."

"Don't say that. They have been worse a great many times, and then things have always come round a little."

“He doesn’t believe me, Miller. That is what comes of health like mine; nobody will believe that I am worse now than I have ever been before.” Gordon patted the thin hand that lay on the bed. He had heard these words *many* times, and he was not alarmed by them.

“This lady is rather a character,” he said; “she will amuse you. She is Scotch, and she is rather strong-minded, and ——”

“I never could bear strong-minded women,” cried the patient with some energy. “But what do I care whether she is Scotch or Spanish, or what she is? Besides that, she has helped me already, and all I want is Dora. Oh, Harry, did you see Dora?—my Dora, my little girl! And so tall, and so well grown, and so sweet! And to think that I cannot have her, cannot see her, now that I am going to die!”

“Why shouldn’t you have her?” he said in his calm voice. “Her father is better; and no

man, however unreasonable, would prevent her coming to see her own relation. You don't understand, dear aunt. You won't believe that people are all very like each other, not so cruel and hard-hearted as you suppose. You would not be unkind to a sick person, why should he?"

"Oh, it's different—very different!" the sick woman said.

"Why should it be different? A quarrel that is a dozen years old could never be so bitter as that."

"It is you who don't understand. I did him harm—oh, such harm! Never, never could he forgive me! I never want him to hear my name. And to ask Dora from him—oh no, no! Don't do it, Harry—not if I was at my last breath!"

"If you ever did him harm as you say—though I don't believe you ever did any one harm—that is why you cannot forgive him.



Aunt, you may be sure he has forgiven you."

"I—I—forgive? Oh, never, never had I anything to forgive—never! I—oh if you only knew!"

"I wouldn't say anything to excite her, Mr. Harry," said the maid. "She isn't so well, really; she's very bad, as true as can be. I've sent for the doctor."

"Yes, tell him!" cried the poor lady eagerly; "tell him that you have never seen me so ill. Tell him, Miller, that I'm very bad, and going to die!"

"We'll wait and hear what the doctor says, ma'am," said the maid cautiously.

"But Dora, Harry—oh, bring her, bring her! How am I to die without my Dora? Oh, bring her! Ask this lady—I don't mind her being strong-minded or anything, if she will bring my child. Harry, you must steal her away, if he will

not let her come. I have a right to her. It is her duty to come to me when I am going to die!"

"Don't excite her, sir, for goodness' sake; promise anything," whispered the maid.

"I will, aunt. I'll run away with her. I'll have a carriage with a couple of ruffians to wait round the corner, and I'll throw something over her head to stifle her cries, and then we'll carry her away."

"It isn't any laughing matter," she said, recovering her composure a little. "If you only knew, Harry! But I couldn't, I couldn't tell you—or any one. Oh, Harry, my poor boy, you'll find out a great many things afterwards, and perhaps you'll blame me. I know you'll blame me. But remember I was always fond of you, and always kind to you all the same. You won't forget that, however badly you may think of me. Oh, Harry, my dear, my dear!"

“Dear aunt, as if there could ever be any question of blame from me to you!” he said, kissing her hand.

“But there will be a question. Everybody will blame me, and you will be obliged to do it too, though it goes against your kind heart. I seem to see everything, and feel what’s wrong, and yet not be able to help it. I’ve always been like that,” she said, sobbing. “Whatever I did, I’ve always known it would come to harm; but I’ve never been able to stop it, to do different. I’ve done so many, many things! Oh, if I could go back and begin different from the very first! But I shouldn’t. I am just as helpless now as then. And I know just how you will look, Harry, and try not to believe, and try not to say anything against me ——”

“If you don’t keep quiet, ma’am, I’ll have to go and leave you! and a nurse is what you will

get—a nurse out of the hospital, as will stand no nonsense.”

“Oh, Miller, just one word! Harry, promise me you’ll think of what I said, and that you will not blame ——”

“Never,” he said, rising from her side. “I acquit you from this moment, aunt. You can never do anything that will be evil in my eyes. But is not the room too dark, and don’t you mean to have any lunch? A little light and a little cutlet, don’t you think, Miller? No? Well, I suppose you know best, but you’ll see that is what the doctor will order. I’m going to get mine, anyhow, for I’m as hungry as a hunter. Blame you? Is it likely?” he said, stooping to kiss her.

Notwithstanding his affectionate fidelity, he was glad to be free of the darkened room and oppressive atmosphere and troubled colloquy. To return to ordinary daylight and life was a

relief to him. But he had no very serious thoughts, either about the appeal she had made to him or her condition. He had known her as ill and as hysterical before. When she was ill she was often emotional, miserable, fond of referring to mysterious errors in her past. Harry thought he knew very well what these errors were. He knew her like the palm of his hand, as the French say. He knew the sort of things she would be likely to do, foolish things, inconsiderate, done in a hurry—done, very likely, as she said, with a full knowledge that they ought not to be done, yet that she could not help it. Poor little aunt! he could well believe in any sort of silly thing, heedless, and yet not altogether heedless either, disapproved of in her mind even while she did it. Our children know us better than any other spectators know us. They know the very moods in which we are likely to do wrong. What a good thing it is that with that

they love us all the same, more or less, as the case may be! And that their eyes, though so terribly clear-sighted, are indulgent too; or, if not indulgent, yet are ruled by the use and wont, the habit of us, and of accepting us, whatever we may be.

Young Gordon knew exactly, or thought he knew, what sort of foolish things she might have done, or even yet might be going to do. Her conscience was evidently very keen about this Mr. Mannering, this sister's husband, as he appeared to be; perhaps she had made mischief, not meaning it and yet half meaning it, between him and his wife, and could not forgive herself, or hope to be forgiven. Her own husband had been a grave man, very loving to her, yet very serious with her, and he knew that there had never been mention of Dora between these two. Once, he remembered, his guardian had seen the box ready to be despatched, and had asked no questions, but looked for a moment as if he would have

pushed it out of the way with his foot. Perhaps he had disapproved of these feeble attempts to make up to the sister's child for harm done to her mother. Perhaps he had felt that the wrong was unforgiveable, whatever it was. He had taken it for granted that after his death his wife would go home ; and Harry remembered a wistful strange look which he cast upon her when he was dying. But the young man gave himself a little shake to throw off these indications of a secret which he did not know. His nature, as had been said, was averse to secrets ; he refused to have anything to do with a mystery. Everything in which he was concerned was honest and open as the day. He did not dwell on the fact that he had a mystery connected with himself, and was in the curious circumstance of having a mother whom he did not know. It was very odd, he admitted, when he thought of it ; but as he spent his life by the side of a woman who was in all respects exactly

like his mother to him, perhaps it is not so wonderful that his mind strayed seldom to that thought. He shook everything off as he went downstairs, and sat down to luncheon with the most hearty and healthy appetite in the world.



### CHAPTER XIII.

“DORA,” said Mr. Mannering, half raising his head from the large folio which had come from the old book dealer during his illness, and which, in these days of his slow convalescence, had occupied much of his time. After he had spoken that word he remained silent for some time, his head slightly raised, his shoulders bent over the big book. Then he repeated “Dora” again. “Do you think,” he said, “you could carry one of these volumes as far as Fiddler’s, and ask if he would take it back?”

“Take it back!” Dora cried in surprise.

“You can tell him that I do not find it as interesting as I expected—but no; for that might do it harm, and it is very interesting. You might

say our shelves are all filled up with big books, and that I have really no room for it at present, which," he added, looking anxiously up into her face, "is quite true ; for, you remember, when I was so foolish as to order it, we asked ourselves how it would be possible to find a place for it ? But no, no," he said, "these are inventions, and I see your surprise in your face that I should send you with a message that is not genuine. It is true enough, you know, that I am much slackened in the work I wanted this book for. I am slackened in everything. I doubt if I can take up any piece of work again to do any good. I'm old, you see, to have such a long illness," he said, looking at her almost apologetically ; "and, unless it had been with an idea of work, I never could have had any justification in ordering such an expensive book as this."

"You never used to think of that, father," Dora said.

“No, I never used to think of that; but I ought to have done so. I’m afraid I’ve been very extravagant. I could always have got it, and consulted it as much as I pleased at the Museum. It is a ridiculous craze I have had for having the books in my own possession. Many men cannot understand it. Williamson, for instance. He says: ‘In your place I would never buy a book. Why, you have the finest library in the world at your disposal.’ And it’s quite true. There could not be a more ridiculous extravagance on my part, and pride, I suppose to be able to say I had it.”

“I don’t think that’s the case at all,” cried Dora. “What do you care for, father, except your library? You never go anywhere, you have no amusements like other people. You don’t go into society, or go abroad, or—anything that the other people do.”

“That is true enough,” he said, with a little

gleam of pleasure. Then, suddenly taking her hand as she stood beside him: "My poor child, you say that quite simply, without thinking what a terrible accusation it would be if it went on,—a sacrifice of your young life to my old one, and forgetfulness of all a girl's tastes and wishes. We'll try to put that right at least, Dora," he said, with a slight quiver in his lip, "in the future—if there is any future for me."

"Father!" she said indignantly, "as if I didn't like the books, and was not more proud of your work that you are doing——"

"And which never comes to anything," he interjected, sadly shaking his head.

"——than of anything else in the world! I am very happy as I am. I have no tastes or pleasures but what are yours. I never have wanted anything that you did not get for me. You should see," cried Dora, with a laugh, "what Janie and Molly think downstairs. They

think me a princess at the least, with nothing to do, and all my fine clothes ! ”

“ Janie and Molly ! ” he said, — “ Janie and Molly ! And these are all that my girl has to compare herself with—the landlady’s orphan granddaughters ! You children make your arrows very sharp without knowing it. But it shall be so no more. Dora, more than ever I want you to go to Fiddler’s ; but you shall tell him what is the simple truth—that I have had a long illness, which has been very expensive, and that I cannot afford any more expensive books. He might even, indeed, be disposed to buy back some that we have. That is one thing,” he added, with more animation, “ all the books are really worth their price. I have always thought they would be something for you, whether you sold them or kept them, when I am gone. Do you think you could carry one of them as far as Fiddler’s, Dora ? They are in such excellent condition, and it would

show him no harm had come to them. One may carry a book anywhere, even a young lady may. And it is not so very heavy."

"It is no weight at all," cried Dora, who never did anything by halves. "A little too big for my pocket, father; but I could carry it anywhere. As if I minded carrying a book, or even a parcel! I like it—it looks as if one had really something to do."

She went out a few minutes after, lightly, with great energy and animation, carrying under one arm the big book as if it had been a featherweight. It was a fine afternoon, and the big trees in the Square were full of the rustle and breath of life—life as vigorous as if their foliage waved in the heart of the country and not in Bloomsbury. There had been showers in the morning; but now the sun shone warm, and as it edged towards the west sent long rays down the cross streets, making them into openings of pure

light, and dazzling the eyes of the passers-by. Dora was caught in this illumination at every street corner, and turned her face to it as she crossed the opening, not afraid, for either eyes or complexion, of that glow "angry and brave". The great folio, with its worn corners and its tarnished gilding, rather added to the effect of her tall, slim, young figure, strong as health and youth could make it, with limbs a little too long, and joints a little too pronounced, as belonged to her age. She carried her head lightly as a flower, her step was free and light; she looked, as she said, "as if she had something to do," and was wholly capable of doing it, which is a grace the more added, not unusually in these days, to the other graces of early life in the feminine subject. But it is not an easy thing to carry a large folio under your arm. After even a limited stretch of road, the lamb is apt to become a sheep: and to shift such a cumbrous volume from one arm to

another is not an easy matter either, especially while walking along the streets. Dora held on her way as long as she could, till her wrist was like to break, and her shoulder to come out of its socket. Neither she nor her father had in the least realised what the burden was. Then she turned it over with difficulty in both arms, and transferred it to the other side, speedily reducing the second arm to a similar condition, while the first had as yet barely recovered.

It is not a very long way from the corner of the Square to those delightful old passages full of old book-shops, which had been the favourite pasturage of Mr. Mannering, and where Dora had so often accompanied her father. On ordinary occasions she thought the distance to Fiddler's no more than a few steps, but to-day it seemed miles long. And she was too proud to give in, or to go into a shop to rest, while it did not seem safe to trust a precious book, and one that she was



going to give back to the dealer, to a passing boy. She toiled on accordingly, making but slow progress, and very much subdued by her task, her cheeks flushed, and the tears in her eyes only kept back by pride, when she suddenly met walking quickly along, skimming the pavement with his light tread, the young man who had so wounded and paralysed her in Miss Bethune's room, whom she had seen then only for the first time, but who had claimed her so cheerfully by her Christian name as an old friend.

She saw him before he saw her, and her first thought was the quick involuntary one, that here was succour coming towards her ; but the second was not so cheerful. The second was, that this stranger would think it his duty to help her ; that he would conceive criticisms, even if he did not utter them, as to the mistake of entrusting her with a burden she was not equal to ; that he would assume more and more familiarity, perhaps

treat her altogether as a little girl—talk again of the toys he had helped to choose, and all those injurious revolting particulars which had filled her with so much indignation on their previous meeting. The sudden rush and encounter of these thoughts distracting her mind when her body had need of all its support, made Dora's limbs so tremble, and the light so go out of her eyes, that she found herself all at once unable to carry on her straight course, and awoke to the humiliating fact that she had stumbled to the support of the nearest area railing, that the book had slipped from under her tired arm, and that she was standing there, very near crying, holding it up between the rail and her knee.

“Why, Miss Dora!” cried that young man. He would have passed, had it not been for that deplorable exhibition of weakness. But when his eye caught the half-ridiculous, wholly overwhelming misery of the slipping book, the knee

put forth to save it, the slim figure bending over it, he was beside her in a moment. "Give it to me," he cried, suiting the action to the word, and taking it from her as if it had been a feather. Well, she had herself said it was a feather at first.

Dora, relieved, shook her tired arms, straightened her figure, and raised her head ; with all her pride coming back.

"Oh, please never mind. I had only got it out of balance. I am quite, quite able to carry it," she cried.

"Are you going far? And will you let me walk with you? It was indeed to see you I was going—not without a commission."

"To see me?"

The drooping head was thrown back with a pride that was haughty and almost scornful. A princess could not have treated a rash intruder more completely *de haut en bas*. "To me! what could you have to say to me?" the girl seemed to

say, in the tremendous superiority of her sixteen years.

The young man laughed a little—one is not very wise at five and twenty on the subject of girls, yet he had experience enough to be amused by these remnants of the child in this half-developed maiden. “You are going this way?” he said, turning in the direction in which she had been going. “Then let me tell you while we walk. Miss Dora, you must remember this is not all presumption or intrusion on my side. I come from a lady who has a right to send you a message.”

“I did not say you were intrusive,” cried Dora, blushing for shame.

“You only looked it,” said young Gordon; “but you know that lady is my aunt too—at least, I have always called her aunt, for many, many years.”

“Ought I to call her aunt?” Dora said.

“I suppose so indeed, if she is my mother’s sister.”

“Certainly you should, and you have a right ; but I only because she allows me, because they wished it, to make me feel no stranger in the house. My poor dear aunt is very ill—worse, they say, than she has ever been before.”

“Ill?” Dora seemed to find no words except these interjections that she could say.

“I hope perhaps they may be deceived. The doctors don’t know her constitution. I think I have seen her just as bad and come quite round again. But even Miller is frightened: she may be worse than I think, and she has the greatest, the most anxious desire to see you, as she says, before she dies.”

“Dies?” cried Dora. “But how can she die when she has only just come home?”

“That is what I feel, too,” cried the young man, with eagerness. “But perhaps,” he added,

“it is no real reason ; for doesn't it often happen that people break down just at the moment when they come in sight of what they have wished for for years and years ?”

“I don't know,” said Dora, recovering her courage. “I have not heard of things so dreadful as that. I can't imagine that it could be permitted to be ; for things don't happen just by chance, do they ? They are,” she added quite inconclusively, “as father says, all in the day's work.”

“I don't know either,” said young Gordon ; “but very cruel things do happen. However, there is nothing in the world she wishes for so much as you. Will you come to her ? I am sure that you have never been out of her mind for years. She used to talk to me about you. It was our secret between us two. I think that was the chief thing that made her take to me as she did, that she might have some one to speak to about

Dora. I used to wonder what you were at first,—an idol, or a prodigy, or a princess.”

“You must have been rather disgusted when you found I was only a girl,” Dora cried, in spite of herself.

He looked at her with a discriminative gaze, not uncritical, yet full of warm light that seemed to linger and brighten somehow upon her, and which, though Dora was looking straight before her, without a glance to the right or left, or any possibility of catching his eye, she perceived, though without knowing how.

“No,” he said, with a little embarrassed laugh, “quite the reverse, and always hoping that one day we might be friends.”

Dora made no reply. For one thing they had now come (somehow the walk went much faster, much more easily, when there was no big book to carry) to the passage leading to Holborn, a narrow lane paved with big flags, and with dull shops, prin-

cipally book-shops, on either side, where Fiddler, the eminent old bookseller and collector, lived. Her mind had begun to be occupied by the question how to shake this young man off and discharge her commission, which was not an easy one. She hardly heard what he last said. She said to him hastily, "Please give me back the book, this is where I am going," holding out her hands for it. She added, "Thank you very much," with formality, but yet not without warmth.

"Mayn't I carry it in?" He saw by her face that this request was distasteful, and hastened to add, "I'll wait for you outside; there are quantities of books to look at in the windows," giving it back to her without a word.

Dora was scarcely old enough to appreciate the courtesy and good taste of his action altogether, but she was pleased and relieved, though she hardly knew why. She went into the shop, very



glad to deposit it upon the counter, but rather troubled in mind as to how she was to accomplish her mission, as she waited till Mr. Fiddler was brought to her from the depths of the cavern of books. He began to turn over the book with mechanical interest, thinking it something brought to him to sell, then woke up, and said sharply : "Why, this is a book I sent to Mr. Mannering of the Museum a month ago".

"Yes," said Dora, breathless, "and I am Mr. Mannering's daughter. He has been very ill, and he wishes me to ask if you would be so good as to take it back. It is not likely to be of so much use to him as he thought. It is not quite what he expected it to be."

"Not what he expected it to be? It is an extremely fine copy, in perfect condition, and I've been on the outlook for it to him for the past year."

"Yes, indeed," said Dora, speaking like a

bookman's daughter, "even I can see it is a fine example, and my father would like to keep it. But—but—he has had a long illness, and it has been very expensive, and he might not be able to pay for it for a long time. He would be glad if you would be so very obliging as to take it back."

Then Mr. Fiddler began to look blank. He told Dora that two or three people had been after the book, knowing what a chance it was to get a specimen of that edition in such a perfect state, and how he had shut his ears to all fascinations, and kept it for Mr. Mannering. Mr. Mannering had indeed ordered the book. It was not a book that could be picked up from any ordinary collection. It was one, as a matter of fact, which he himself would not have thought of buying on speculation, had it not been for a customer like Mr. Mannering. Probably it might lie for years on his hands, before he should have another opportunity of disposing of it. These arguments

much intimidated Dora, who saw, but had not the courage to call his attention to, the discrepancy between the two or three people who had wanted it, and the unlikelihood of any one wanting it again.

The conclusion was, however, that Mr. Fiddler politely, but firmly, declined to take the book back. He had every confidence in Mr. Mannering of the Museum. He had not the slightest doubt of being paid. The smile, with which he assured her of this, compensated the girl, who was so little more than a child, for the refusal of her request. Of course Mr. Mannering of the Museum would pay, of course everybody had confidence in him. After her father's own depressed looks and anxiety, it comforted Dora's heart to make sure in this way that nobody outside shared these fears. She put out her arms, disappointed, yet relieved, to take back the big book again.

“Have you left it behind you?” cried young

Gordon, who, lingering at the window outside, without the slightest sense of honour, had listened eagerly and heard a portion of the colloquy within.

“Mr. Fiddler will not take it back. He says papa will pay him sooner or later. He is going to send it. It is no matter,” Dora said, with a little wave of her hand.

“Oh, let me carry it back,” cried the young man, with a sudden dive into his pocket, and evident intention in some rude colonial way of solving the question of the payment there and then.

Dora drew herself up to the height of seven feet at least in her shoes. She waved him back from Mr. Fiddler’s door with a large gesture.

“You may have known me for a long time,” she said, “and you called me Dora, though I think it is a liberty; but I don’t know you, not even your name.”

“My name is Harry Gordon,” he said, with

something between amusement and deference, yet a twinkle in his eye.

Dora looked at him very gravely from head to foot, making as it were a *résumé* of him and the situation. Then she gave forth her judgment reflectively, as of a thing which she had much studied. "It is not an ugly name," she said, with a partially approving nod of her head.

END OF VOL. I.



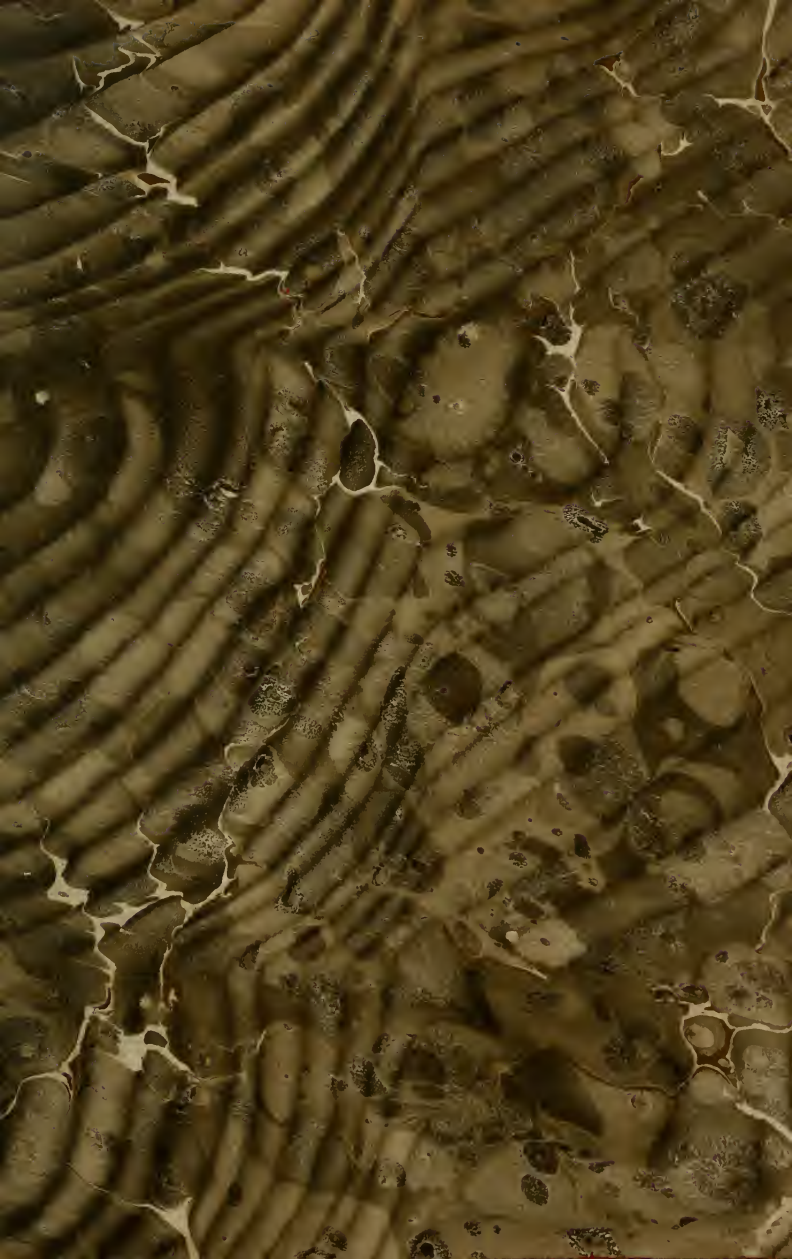












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